

ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE AROUND SOCIAL ISSUES WITH LATINX  
STUDENTS THROUGH LITERATURE DISCUSSION AND CULTURALLY  
RELEVANT LITERATURE

by

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## Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES .....	9
LIST OF FIGURES .....	10
ABSTRACT.....	12
CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Theoretical Frame .....	13
Background of the Study.....	19
Theoretical Foundations .....	23
Literature Review of Related Research .....	30
Overview of Dissertation.....	48
Conclusion .....	50
CHAPTER 2: The Process of Conducting Teacher Research in the SEI Classroom through A Latinx Lens .....	52
Designing Teacher Research in the SEI Classroom.....	53
Designing Research through the Lens of a Latina Teacher Researcher .....	55
Context for the Study .....	57
School Context .....	58
Classroom Context .....	60
Research Questions and Book Selection.....	62
Selection of Books .....	63
Creating A Curriculum Timeline .....	71
Methods of Data Collection .....	84
Teacher Reflection Weekly Memos .....	84
Teacher Reflection Journal Notes .....	87
Audio Recordings .....	88
Data Analysis Process .....	90
Conclusion .....	98
CHAPTER 3: Student Themes and Social Issues Through A Latinx Lens .....	100
The Causes and Consequences of Family Separation .....	101

Family Separation caused from the Border and Immigration .....	103
Separation of Families as Refugees .....	110
Living in a Different Country From Your Family .....	111
The Dangers of Crossing the Border .....	115
The Border Patrol .....	118
The Coyote as Danger .....	125
The Dangers of Crossing the Desert .....	127
The Dreams and Hopes of Crossing the Border .....	131
The American Dream .....	132
The Hope of Having a Safe and Stable Home .....	135
The Hope of Reuniting with Family .....	138
Racism of Marginalized Groups in The United States .....	140
Discrimination Based on Skin Color or Ethnicity .....	141
Racism Leads to Injustice and Violence .....	147
Identity and Language Struggles for Latinx Peoples in the United States .....	151
The Struggle of Belonging: “Am I really American?” .....	153
Forced Identities in Latinx Communities .....	169
Obstacles and Challenges that Latinx Children Encounter and Challenge .....	178
“Do I Have A Voice?” The Perspective of Children on the Power of Adults .....	179
“Finding My Voice”: Children Reflecting on Taking A Stand .....	185
The Fear Latinx Communities Face in The United States .....	190
The Fear of Crossing the Border Into the U.S. for Latinx Communities .....	191
The Fear of Uncertainty .....	196
The Relationship Between Student Dialogue and Literature Discussion Strategies .....	201
Graffiti Boards .....	202

Written Responses .....	206
Sketch to Stretch .....	208
Conclusion .....	210
CHAPTER 4: Teacher Decision Making .....	211
Theoretical Frames that Influenced My Decision Making .....	213
Theoretical Influences on My Decision Making As A Teacher .....	224
External Factors that Impacted Theory and Decision Making in the Classroom .....	235
District and School Requirements .....	236
Social and Personal Factors in Children's Lives .....	241
Connections to Latinx Funds of Knowledge .....	243
Conclusion .....	246
CHAPTER 5: Summary and Implications .....	248
Summary .....	248
Purpose of Study .....	251
Theoretical Frame .....	252
Data Collection and Analysis .....	254
Revisiting Research Findings .....	254
What Social Issues do Students Discuss in Literature Groups? .....	254
How Do Literary Response Strategies Influence Student Dialogue? .....	256
How Does the Theoretical Frame Influence My Decision Making As A Teacher? .....	257
Implications of this Research .....	259
The Power of Literature .....	260
Working for la <i>Raza</i> .....	262
The Power of <i>Literatura en el Salón</i> .....	264
Working <i>Con el Corazón</i> .....	266
Planting <i>Semillitas</i> .....	267

Implications for Future Research .....	269
Conclusion .....	270
APPENDIX A: The Original Curriculum Timeline Proposal .....	274
APPENDIX B: Original Template to Guide this Study .....	281
CHILDREN’S LITERATURE REFERENCES.....	282
REFERENCES .....	284



## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 2.1</b> Titles of Books and Book Pairings .....	63
<b>Table 2.2</b> Novels Selected to Read Whole Group for the Study .....	70
<b>Table 2.3</b> Weekly Schedule Block for ELA, ILLP, and Study .....	72
<b>Table 2.4</b> Timeline for the books to be read and grouped by weeks .....	75

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Coding example of various colored post it notes to list themes .....	94
Figure 2.2 Coding of data using post-its for themes and subthemes.....	94
Figure 2.3 Grouping post-its to find bigger themes and subthemes .....	95
Figure 2.4 Sorting and color-coding themes and subthemes.....	96
Figure 2.5 Organizing the seven themes and subthemes.....	97
Figure 2.6 Finding the seven themes.....	97
Figure 3.1 Web of the theme on family separation and its subthemes .....	103
Figure 3.2 Paulo's sketch to stretch of the border and chaos .....	106
Figure 3.3 Valentín's response to <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> .....	107
Figure 3.4 Genesis' response to <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> .....	109
Figure 3.5 Valentín's reflection on <i>Dear Primo</i> .....	112
Figure 3.6 Valentín's response to <i>Waiting for Papá</i> .....	113
Figure 3.7 Carlos' graffiti board drawing of a family with the word family written.....	114
Figure 3.8 Web of the theme on The Dangers of Crossing the Border. ....	117
Figure 3.9 Carlos' Response to <i>The Journey</i> .....	119
Figure 3.10 Valentín's response to <i>The Journey</i> and <i>Dreamers</i> .....	120
Figure 3.11 Juan's response to <i>The Journey</i> .....	121
Figure 3.12 Paula's graffiti board in response to Lupita's comment .....	124
Figure 3.13 Response by Genesis to <i>Pancho Rabbit and The Coyote</i> .....	126
Figure 3.14 Adán's response to <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> . ....	127
Figure 3.15 Genesis' Response to <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> .....	128
Figure 3.16 Carlos' response to <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> .....	129
Figure 3.17 Roberto's Response to <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> .....	130
Figure 3.18 The web for the theme The Dreams and Hopes of Crossing the Border with its subthemes.....	131
Figure 3.19 Rosa's response to <i>Amelia's Road</i> .....	137
Figure 3.20 María's response to <i>Amelia's Road</i> .....	139
Figure 3.21 Web of the theme on Racism of Marginalized Groups in the United States....	141
Figure 3.22 Lupita's graffiti board response in January .....	143

Figure 3.23 Lupita's graffiti board response in January	
["Take a stand everybody should have freedom!" in the graffiti board].....	145
Figure 3.24 Lili's graffiti board response in January.....	146
Figure 3.25 Joel's Sketch to Stretch. ....	148
Figure 3.26 Adán's Sketch to Stretch on <i>Dreamers</i> and <i>The Journey</i> .....	149
Figure 3.27 Joel's Sketch to Stretch on <i>Dremers</i> and <i>The Journey</i> .....	150
Figure 3.28 Web of the theme Identity and Language Struggles for Latinx in the U.S. ....	153
Figure 3.29 Genesis' drawing of Marisol McDonald in a graffiti board. ....	154
Figure 3.30 Joel's drawing of Marisol in a graffiti board.....	155
Figure 3.31 Joel's drawing of <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> on the graffiti board...	159
Figure 3.32 Juan's response to <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> in the graffiti board ...	160
Figure 3.33 Valentín's written response to <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> .....	165
Figure 3.34 María's response to <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> .....	166
Figure 3.35 Valentín's response to <i>Mamá the Alien</i> .....	172
Figure 3.36 Lupita's response to <i>Mamá the Alien</i> .....	173
Figure 3.37 María's response to <i>Mamá the Alien</i> .....	174
Figure 3.38 Juan's response to <i>Mamá the Alien</i> .....	175
Figure 3.39 Paula's response to <i>Mamá the Alien</i> . ....	176
Figure 3.40 Sahid's response to <i>Mamá the Alien</i> .....	177
Figure 3.41 Web of the theme Obstacles and Challenges Latinx Children Face.....	179
Figure 3.42 Genesis' sketch to stretch for <i>Amelia's Road</i> .....	181
Figure 3.43 Lupita's sketch to stretch response to <i>Amelia's Road</i> .....	182
Figure 3.44 María's response to <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> .....	184
Figure 3.45 Roberto's written response to <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> .....	184
Figure 3.46 Romero's Sketch to Stretch Response to <i>Amelia's Road</i> .....	186
Figure 3.47 María's response to <i>Amelia's Road</i> .....	187
Figure 3.48 Adán's response to books on immigration .....	189
Figure 3.49 Web of the theme The Fear Latinx Communities Face in the United States ...	191
Figure 3.50 Rosa's graffiti board response to <i>The Journey</i> .....	192
Figure 3.51 Adán's response to <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> .....	194
Figure 3.52 Paulo's response to <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> .....	195
Figure 3.53 Genesis' response to <i>I'm New Here</i> .....	197
Figure 3.54 Genesis' response to <i>My Diary From Here to There</i> .....	198

Figure 3.55 Graffiti board drawing of “Momo”.....	199
Figure 3.56 A second picture of Momo in the same Graffiti board.....	200

### **ABSTRACT**

This teacher research study examines literature discussions with fourth and fifth grade Latinx students about books that reflect Latinx experiences. For this study, the following questions are explored (1) What social issues do students discuss in literature groups? (2) How do literary response strategies influence student dialogue? And (3) How does my theoretical frame influence my decision making as a teacher?

Theories that informed the construction of the literature discussions and the decision making occurring throughout the study are examined closely. The theories intertwine and bridge education and students’ experiences as a resource in learning more about the educational setting. In this study, the discussions of students and the literature response strategies are explored as the data is analyzed to examine the student discussions around issues of immigration, family separation, borders, and so much more.

The findings in this study indicate that the experiences of Latinx students are integral to the educational setting and an education that invites who they are enhances their learning experiences. Latinx students are eager for learning opportunities that invite their voices and stories. It is through the construction and assessment of the educational setting that educators can promote culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining teaching experiences that go beyond the classroom setting. Latinx students build relationships with each other and their teachers as they engage in discussions that allow them to share and learn with each other. This study is a reminder of the crucial role teachers play in creating such powerful spaces and the value that Latinx students bring into the classroom when invited to discuss, engage, and create powerful learning experiences.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction and Theoretical Frame

*“I am playing with my self...I am playing with the world’s soul. I am the dialogue between my self an el espiritu del mundo. I change myself...I change the world.*

*-Gloria Anzaldua*

“About 3 percent of Latinos in the United States attend college” the professor said on the first day of class. The room was quiet as he walked at the front of the room looking at all of us. “Only 1 percent of Latinos go to graduate school and get a doctorate’s degree” he added holding one finger up looking at the whiteboard in the front of the room. “So why you? Why... are... you...here?” he asked as he turned around to look at the classroom. The room was quiet as our professor looked at us through his eyeglasses and placed his hands behind his back.

“What happened in your life that brought you here, to this place, to this moment? Think about it, why you and not everyone else around you?” His question surprised me as he moved his hands with his speech to add emphasis to what he was projecting. As I silently reflected, he asked the question multiple times and yet, there were no answers. The room was silent. I guess none of us had thought about that before.

The room fell silent as the Latinx students looked to each other for responses. I will never forget the moment our Latino professor asked us, Latinx students, those questions the first day of class as we embarked on Spanish literature in our undergraduate studies at the University of Arizona. His questions still resound with me to this very day. Why me? Why not my peers or friends from high school? Why is it that only *I* made it this far?

Being Latino himself, it was as if our professor was also reflecting on his accomplishments. How is that only certain of us made it this far? I kept thinking about his questions even as I rode the city bus home that day. As I looked out the windows near the university, I saw multiple students from all ranges of our country and world, but there weren't many Latinx students. As I got off the bus stop near home, I walked through the streets filled with colorful and vibrant shops with images of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, and smells of Mexican bread. I looked towards the sky and thought about my new journey as I embarked into the University.

Being brought up in the south side of Tucson, I grew up surrounded by my Latinx community, listening to stories being shared from elders and to music filling the streets as neighbors celebrated life. My parents have always found education important. Their value for education became mine. Growing up there were no excuses. My mother would say: "*enferma o no enferma, tú vas a ir a la escuela*," meaning: sick or not sick, you're still going to school. I always went to school. It became my pathway to a better future.

My father, born in Mexico City, never had the privilege to go beyond the sixth grade. He had to stop work to help his family. As for my mother, she never got to go to the University, it was too expensive and she had children to raise at that time. For my mother and father, schooling is an inheritance they can offer. So, I zipped up my backpack every day and went to school for them, for me, and my family.

The value of schooling comes from my grandparents, who also instilled in us the values of hard work and growth in academic knowledge. My grandfather used to work at the University as a gardener. He'd drive my mother and her five siblings every weekend or so to help out with the labors of cutting the grass and, on monsoon season, which usually starts in July, to cover the

grass with big cars, so the grass wouldn't get too wet. He'd look out at the baseball stadium in awe of the sport and its students.

The supplies students at the university didn't use would become the school supplies my mother used for her education. Students would toss supplies into nearby dumpsters, only for my grandfather to dive in and collect all the notebooks that were not used. "These could be used well by you," he'd tell my mother and her siblings. These stories were passed on to me as I attended elementary school. I wanted to make my parents and my grandfather proud.

Attending Las Mariposas Elementary was an honor. My mother had attended that school herself. In a school surrounded by our neighbors felt amazing, I felt connected to my peers in school, like family. We'd grown up together and knew each other. After school, we'd jump rope in the street until dinner was ready and were called into our homes to get ready for the evening.

School felt amazing. I learned literature outside of my own culture. I read books such as *Charlotte's Web* and *Holes*, which at that time, was released as a new movie. My teachers, Mr. Lumm and Mrs. Ornelas, were my inspiration to fall in love with literature and teaching. But, as I went into middle school, my view of education changed. I didn't fit in. At the middle school I attended, I had white peers who made fun of me, even my teachers. I was told to "go back to where I came from" and called a "mojada" or "wetback." which I didn't know what that meant at that time. My English was bad and I was told to speak it "right."

I remember going to classes where there were no books that reflected who I was. I began feeling different, alienated, and like I didn't belong. My peers talked in words that led me to feel like I no longer understood English. Tests asked questions on experiences or situations that I'd never lived. I felt useless, like I was no longer smart. I began to realize that is why in Las Mariposas most of my teachers had us read many books with white characters in them. At the

time it wasn't odd, but reflecting back now, it seems odd that most of my teachers who were Latinx in elementary school would only read books with white characters.

For the next years going into high school, who I was as a person needed to dissolve. I had to become the "norm" and learn to speak English right. This led me to stop speaking Spanish at school and eventually at home. Being myself wasn't good enough, so I had to change. I spent hours speaking English and reading novels. I'd learn from my white peers and read the books they were reading.

In high school, I was surrounded by Latinx peers once again, but even then, the curriculum had not changed, the tests had not become any different. The novels read didn't represent me. From *The Odyssey* to *Romeo and Juliet*, the literary elements and writing were so different than my own and I had to learn how to truly *read* them. I saw my Latinx peers struggle and fall behind. Some began calling me "smart" because I knew exactly what the text was saying.

I'd remind myself that I wanted a better future. But how could my losses become my gains? Did success mean I had to completely lose myself in order to become a successful person? Did that mean being Latinx isn't successful? There was a specific assignment I had my junior year, where according to my teacher, I wrote "eloquently." My teachers in high school were mostly white. "I must encourage you to take an AP course," Mr. Reitz said to me one day after school. "Your paper is beautiful," he added as he brought in the English AP teacher. She smiled and said, "You'd have to work extra hard to get an A in my class." I felt scared. "She will," he said. I went home to share the news with my mom who said I should give it a go. For her, taking AP classes meant that I was doing good. But we both didn't realize the true power or effect education was playing on my cultural identity. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017) state,



*The overwhelming majority of the students' time in school was spent learning discrete facts that might be referenced on standardized tests but were rarely applicable to their lives. It was seldom that students were encouraged or assisted in making connections between the content they learned in schools and their lived experiences or future goals. (p.89)*

As I delved into the AP English course my senior year, I was surrounded by Latinx peers who seemed different from my peers at lunch time. They spoke eloquently with vocabulary words I'd never used in English. For much of the class, discussing and analyzing literature such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lord of the Flies* was challenging. We were required to write a literary analysis and if the teacher gave you an A +, you would have your name written on the board in front of the class. For months, I did not see my name. I pushed myself more and more. My lunch time and free period was spent working extra hard, until finally my name was on that board. But then, there was a twisted turn, students in AP were allowed to apply to the University of Arizona and universities of their choice, while my Latinx peers applied to a community college.

I was distraught. I thought everyone was given the same opportunity. I wasn't in good academic standing myself, with an average GPA. "Are you guys applying to the U of A?" I asked my best friend Brenda. "No" she said chewing her gum. "Why? Are you?". At that moment I didn't know what to say. I went home distraught. I wanted my peers to go to college, Brenda was such a good writer and Stacy was excellent at math. I didn't expect to go to the University. At a family barbeque as I was asked by my aunts and uncles what I would do after college. I thought about going to the U of A and shared that. Nothing but laughs resounded across the room. "Ha! Ha! Ha! You go to the University?" My cousin said laughing as my mom and dad were in the kitchen and I was outside with my aunts, uncles and cousins. "You're too stupid to go to the University," my cousin said and my aunts and uncles laughed.

I felt humiliated. I hadn't seen my identity and culture in school. My Latinx peers were not even aware that they could apply to the University; they were only encouraged to apply to a community college. "I want you to apply to college *mi'ja*", my mom said one October afternoon. "But, we don't have that much money. I'm not so sure", she added. "Let's take a risk," my dad suggested. "Yeah," my mom agreed. I left behind all the doubts and applied for the University. Over the next few weeks, my peers in the AP classes were getting acceptance letters. "I got accepted!" one student shouted, "Me too!" another said.

Finally, one afternoon as my dad came back from work, I saw his hands covered in dust and drywall from the day's work, embracing a large envelope. "Dice que es para tí," I looked at it, "es de la universidad," I took the large envelope and gulped. "Dad," I said crying as I read the letter. "I got in! I got in!" as I jumped to embrace my dad in a hug. "Si se puede," he said. My sleepless nights of hard work and infinite prayers led to this moment.

"So, why are you here? Why not your peers?" my Spanish professor's words resound in my heart. Although I did not have an answer then, I now have theories that serve as tools, which may speak to his questions which have now become my own. Geneva Gay (2018) says: "Decontextualizing teaching and learning from the ethnicities, cultures, and experiences of students minimize the chances that their achievement potential will ever be fully realized" (p.30).

My story serves as a method for contextualizing the role education has played in my life as I reflect on my past experiences. Those experiences enhance my approach as an educator today, so that I may contextualize my teaching practices and pedagogies to best serve Latinx and other marginalized students. I strive to become an educator who enhances what students bring to the classroom by creating spaces for them to share who they are with each other and to embrace literature as it embraces their identities, to make gains in the educational system.

What was lacking in my experience attending school as a Latina? What was it that my Latinx peers did not acquire or achieve in order to pursue a higher education? Is there a factor that plays into or is removed from the educational experience for the Latinx community? This teacher research study will not explore those questions in detail, but it does reflect a fragment or piece that I felt was missing in my education growing up as a Latina, which I came to realize in graduate school.

In graduate school, I found children's books and young adult novels reflecting my identity and cultural experiences. I learned the power of critical thinking and using literature to pose problems, questions, and solutions. It was through these experiences in graduate school that I was able to connect my experiences with what I found lacking as a student, to now learn and enhance my teaching as I became an educator at Las Mariposas Elementary. It is imperative therefore, to use my experiences to inform my approach to education as a teacher. These experiences led to this teacher research study to examine the responses of Latinx students in my fourth and fifth grade classroom to culturally relevant literature. I also examine my own teaching decisions, particularly my use of theory to make these decisions. This chapter discusses my background related to the study, introduces my theoretical frames, reviews related research studies, and overviews the chapters in this dissertation.

### **Background of the Study**

Las Mariposas Elementary holds a special place in my heart. As a student there, I encountered teachers who inspired me to find my passion in teaching and reading. Las Mariposas was the elementary school I attended, and I returned to as an educator. In May of 2014, I graduated with my bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. I went back to Las Mariposas

and acquired a position there as a 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher in an English Language Development classroom.

I taught third and fourth grade and moved to teach fourth and fifth for the next two years. I am now in my sixth year of teaching and throughout my six years of teaching experience I have taught the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade combo or the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade combination or combo. Combo meaning that I teach two grade levels throughout the day. A combination class is due to low numbers of students enrolled in school and merging two grades together allows a teacher a full class he or she can instruct.

At the same time I received a job at Las Mariposas, I began my master's degree at the University of Arizona and shortly after began my doctorate program. I immersed myself into theory that allowed me to reflect and think critically about my educational experience in school and think about social justice, funds of knowledge, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the theory of transaction. As I embarked on my studies, I found myself implementing the theories that I gained from graduate school into my pedagogy with students at Las Mariposas.

One project that was a crucial step into my own work as a graduate student was a paper I wrote in which I reflected on the current school curriculum. I looked at theories through a social justice lens to create a new curriculum for myself and the classroom. The paper followed an incident where a student was bullied at Las Mariposas Elementary and the actions or steps schools need to take to be inclusive for all students. In the paper, *Building Our Community as Advocates for Diversity: Through A Lens on Bullying*, I specifically looked at the resources I currently had, such as the AVENUES curriculum for ELD students and how I could use that curriculum along with literature that reflected students' identity and culture. It was crucial for me to do this work because of the bullying incident. A student had been bullied for his skin color

and would go home scrubbing his skin to remove his skin color. His story and the lack of support from the school really struck me as the teacher and the administrator did nothing to support this student. Although the story headlined in the local news, there was no change for the student and days later, the mother decided to take her child to another school. This made me feel distraught. Years before I felt ashamed for speaking Spanish because my peers had said my English was terrible and in 2016, a student found himself in a situation that excluded who he was. This led me to building a stronger learning community in my classroom so that I would not become that teacher, but a teacher for social justice education. In that paper I wrote,

*Building my curriculum around a social justice centered classroom, gave me the opportunity to see, that I can use current resources available in my classroom, to dig just a little deeper into these conversations. One example of that, is the use of the AVENUES books that the English Language Development (ELD) class, requires you to use. I would have never had imagined, to combine and to pair these books to my theme on bullying and diversity, with that of the other social justice illustrative books too. This allowed me to see that even in our ELD books, we can dig deeper into having these very important and responsive dialogues with children.*

The paper took me into theoretical frames that looked at social justice teaching, by looking at work such as Ayers, Kumashiro, and Stovall (2017) who stated in his chapter “Our Communities Deserve Justice! Social Justice Teaching and Community Building”: “As teachers, we counter each of these messages with a pedagogy of love and truth-telling, connection and community, and an update three R’s: relevance, relationship, revolution” (p. 91).

As I reflected on this chapter, I recalled the authors mentioning that social justice centered classrooms call for action and hope. They call for a classroom opposed to injustices and hate and instead support classrooms that involve a dialogue of love, as proposed by Paulo Freire, deeply presented in his text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Ayers, et.al. (2017) states:

*Justice-centered teaching opposes in the objectification of people all the forces that transform people into things for use. We oppose violence in its many overt and hidden*

*forms. We oppose discrimination and segregation and exploitation of people. We support kindness, cooperation, fairness, courage, independent thinking, peace, love, and balance. Justice-centered teaching lives out a kind of happy and hopeful opposition. Our work is explicit and intentional in its focus on changing both individuals and the collective conditions of our lives—classrooms, neighborhoods, cities, nation, and larger world. (p. 92)*

Including Freire and Ayers et. al's work was very powerful for me, because these scholars resonated with my process in how and why I built my curriculum. They also connected to my whole process and purpose for becoming a teacher in the first place. I seek to create curriculum that is both intentional and responsive to my Latinx community.

This paper reflected what I was interested in looking at as both an educator and a graduate student immersed in theoretical work. For me, community, culture, identity, and the value of funds of knowledge comes first. It is crucial that educators create spaces where students can find value in themselves and their community.

Along with creating spaces to build community and shifting my pedagogy to strive for social justice in the classroom, my love for literature also played a role in my work. I began exploring theories around literacy and found value in Rosenblatt's theory of transaction paired with many other theories as I reflected on the role of the reader, the role of the teacher, the role of the role of dialogue and text, and the role of literacy and education. I explored three major components that I find valuable in teaching literacy: reflection, action, and transformation. I wrote a paper, *The Pillars of Literacy: Re-constructing A Framework for Literacy Discussion Circles Through Theory Exploration*, where I looked at these roles closely.

In this analysis, I delved into the theorists and made connections from Paulo Freire (1970) to Louise Rosenblatt (1965). I described literacy as complex, stating that the complexities of literacy range from the theoretical frameworks to the practices held in the classroom, including the approaches and development that unravels in the process and through the dialogue

that invite close explorations with others. This literature review explored a strand of that complex structure by looking closely at the dialogue between certain theoretical frames that informed my practices as an educator who is re-strategizing the ways in which to approach literacy in the classroom and look at specific aspects of it. As I delved into teacher research, I found that Louise Rosenblatt (1965) and Paulo Freire (1970) hold a strong dialogue within this complexity that informs my work on literature discussion circles, as both look closely at reflection, action, and transformation. This chapter looks closely at those aspects of theory that inform my pedagogy. These theorists inform my teaching and this research study while giving a spotlight to the Latinx communities.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The theoretical foundations for this study are introduced in this section. Chapter 4 explores these theories in detail as I connect the theoretical frames to my decision making as a teacher researcher and seek to understand how these theories influenced my teaching.

Louise Rosenblatt (1965) states that the reader and text work collaboratively to create a transaction. Her theory states that neither the text nor the reader are one above the other. She references this experience through an analogy, stating that the reader and the text are center stage and that the spotlight is on both. Rosenblatt (1965) adds that the reader brings in his or her experience in the process of reading with the text stating, “The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition” (p. 30).

The reader brings in a lens and stance that adds value to the literary experience and what the reader gains from the transaction. According to *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, Rosenblatt

(1978) shares this involvement by stating that the reader should not be invisible to the process, but actively involved. Her response demands that the reader be acknowledged in this process, not ignored. She states, “Throughout the centuries, it becomes apparent, usually either the book or the author has received major illumination. The reader has tended to remain in shadow, taken for granted, to all intents and purposes invisible” (p. 1).

Rosenblatt’s theory on transaction holds value in the reader, the text, and what she terms the poem, which she refers to as the meaning constructed in the reading experience. Her work adds value to the view of the act of reading and the importance of seeing the bigger picture of the literary experience.

Gordon Pradl’s (1996) work speaks to Rosenblatt’s theory on transaction, as he looks at literacy as a tool for democracy. He talks about creating a classroom environment in which students can work together to come up with solutions and have critical discussions. He states that the power of literature informs students to collaboratively to come up with solutions, stating,

*One central purpose of reading literature in a democracy with students of all ages is to give them space for their unique responses—everyone included. When responses are drawn out and shared to the midst of a democratic ethos, students learn to distinguish between the kind of authority that controls from positions of power and exclusion, and the kind of authority that influences from positions of reason and caring ( pg. 46).*

Through literature, students can critique, analyze, and reflect on power structures and use literature to promote these discussions to create a more democratic classroom. Literature is a powerful tool for creating spaces for democratic conversations. Pradl (1996) adds,

*Literary texts are central to democratic education. They affirm and confirm—through the personal acts of aesthetic evocations that are necessary to access them—the uniqueness of the individual, even while insisting that such acts inevitably relate to sharing and participating in the actions of a larger community. Literature embodies an ethical way of knowing, and so one reader’s reading can never be adequately substituted for another’s. In Rosenblatt’s transactional scheme, solitary readers responding are simply never to be found. She sees group effort as supportive of individual human agency ( p. 81).*



This excerpt confirms the idea of the importance of dialogue that literacy can promote, only when the educational environment provides that access for both teachers and students to collaborate and use transaction to create action. Thus, for Pradl (1996), spaces for collaboration are an important aspect for both teachers and students to work collectively through the powerful tool of literacy.

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Students need to have a space where they can collectively share their experiences with each other. The purpose of education is far more than educating children. On the contrary, education can also be a means in which students inform the teaching practices occurring in the classroom, to create a space for students to empower themselves and feel valued, as they bring in their knowledge and stories.

Extending on Pradl's work, Paulo Freire (1970) adds that education can become an experience for students and teachers to think about issues and problems, through problem-posing education. He states that education can become a space where the educator and students work together as problem-posers to think critically about the world and society. Freire (1970) states, "The role of the problem-posing educator is to create: together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by true knowledge at the level of the logos" (p. 81).

Rather than "dumping" knowledge on students, Freire states that the classroom should promote the rich dialogue that brings teachers and students together to think about their world.

The teacher is neither the influencer or leader, but the facilitator and collaborator with the students. When that occurs, Freire (1970) states, “The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking” (p. 77).

When students and teachers find themselves on the same ground, only then, can a true difference be made. Students should not feel oppressed by educators, in fact, students and teachers need to work together for education to strive in its true purpose as a democratic community. Freire states that dialogue is an important tool in this aspect, stating that with love, hope, faith, humility, and mutual trust, there can be a true change. This change pertains to the classroom, the community, and in the lives of those enacting that change.

Funds of knowledge is another important aspect in the educational setting. The theory on funds of knowledge states that students bring in knowledge to the classroom. In other words, students are not empty vessels to be filled, in fact, students bring in knowledge from the home that adds value and enhances the educational setting. Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, and Norma Gonzalez (2005) state: “As future teachers, however, it is important that they not only finish assignments. We need them to genuinely and passionately care about and value their students, families, and communities’ funds of knowledge: their strengths, assets, and possibilities” (p. 218).

Funds of knowledge approaches move away from preconceptions of students. Instead, funds of knowledge invites teachers to go beyond the classroom and make home visits and explore the knowledge that families and the communities already have. Funds of knowledge asks that teachers invite students’ funds of knowledge into the classroom, by incorporating spaces for students to share their stories or bringing in family members to share their knowledge with the

classroom. When funds of knowledge are invited into the classroom, the child feels valued and in return, the classroom sees that value in that student. Luis Moll, et.al.(2005) state,

*The key point is that human beings and their social worlds are inseparable. They are embedded in each other; thus, human thinking is irreducible to individual properties or traits. Instead it is always mediated, distributed among persons, artifacts, activities, and settings. People think in conjunction with the artifacts and resources of their social worlds, and these artifacts and resources, in turn, are made available through the social relationships and settings within which human beings constitute their lives. (p. 261)*

Hence learning experiences are enhanced when funds of knowledge are brought into the classroom. Not only do students learn from one another, but they learn more about themselves and the value their funds of knowledge bring to the classroom.

In addition to funds of knowledge, incorporating a culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy as an educator brings in a value to whom students are as human beings. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) speaks to the value of education embracing a culturally relevant curriculum, stating that when marginalized students or students of color find education that speaks to one's culture and identity, students believe in themselves and the role they play in the educational setting. Marginalized students and students of color see themselves in a new light as they think critically about education and decolonization. Geneva Gay (2018) states that culturally responsive teaching responds to who students are. Gay (2018) explores how educators can be culturally responsive to students, stating that "stories educate us about ourselves and others; they capture our attention on a very personal level, and entice us to see, know, desire, imagine, construct, and become more than what we currently are" (p. 3). Her emphasis on the power of story and bringing in students' cultures and identities into the classroom speaks to the role of genuine education where all students can think and work collaboratively to reflect on the world. In addition, Samy H. Alim and Django Paris (2017) add that being culturally sustaining enhances

education, so that as students' cultures shift so does education. Education is thus, always moving with students and serving their needs. They argue,

*In this way, students' cultures and languages shared through stories are not trivialized, minimized, or locked in the past; they are dynamic, shifting, and evolving in healing and revitalizing ways. Their stories herein provide a glimpse into the ways culturally sustaining pedagogies can unleash the power held in the space between the telling and hearing of stories through pens, pencils, and paintbrushes. To sustain our selves and the cultures that we are constantly shaping, creating, and impacting, there must be opportunities—particularly in schooling spaces—to be heard in meaningful ways that have the chance to be reciprocated in sacred truth spaces. (p. 113)*

The theoretical frames on culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining pedagogies, speak to the truth that individuals bring into the classroom. Learning experiences are enhanced when students are given opportunities to bring their stories to the classroom. The theoretical frames thus allow educators and researchers to think about the roles students, educators, and literature can play in a classroom setting. John Dewey (1938) adds to this by talking about experience, which he argues is essential to the role of education. He acknowledges the importance of the role of the student, but also the responsibility of the educator, stating “every experience is a moving force” (p. 38). This force carries on a significant meaning in education when students can create an experience and live their schooling with the help of their previous experiences through funds of knowledge and relevant pedagogy. For Dewey, there is a strong aspect in the role and criteria of experience that becomes fruitful for both the educator and the role education plays:

*An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation; or the toys which he is playing; the book he is reading. ( pp. 43-44)*

Henceforth, education requires an acknowledgement that the opportunities for transaction are valuable because they lead to an experience. Throughout his work, Dewey (1938) begs important questions for educators to consider in regard to the role of education stating,

*What we want and need is education pure and simple, and we shall make surer and faster progress when we devote ourselves to finding out just what education is and what conditions have to be satisfied in order that education may be a reality and not a name or a slogan. It is for this reason alone that I have emphasized the need for a sound philosophy of experience. (Dewey, p. 91)*

Educators, therefore, must reflect on their positionalities as teachers related to those of students and revisit the idea of purpose and freedom. In addition, education must resonate along with experience, because it is only through experience that students are able to transform in the classroom.

These theoretical frames construct the overall backbone to this research as I not only looked at the theoretical frames and how they informed my practice, but also the decision-making aspect of theory which is explored closely in chapter 4. This section gives an overview of the theories that influenced my work. The theoretical frames highlighted in this section permitted me to think more deeply about the role of literacy, educators, students, and education. This section described the theories that related to literacy and education by looking at Louise Rosenblatt, Gordon Pradl, and Paulo Freire. Their theories speak to the value of literacy and the value of creating spaces in the classroom where students can reflect, think critically, and transform their world through powerful educational experiences. In addition, this section discussed the cultural aspects and identities of students and the push for integrating theories in the classroom that support students' knowledge and culture. The next section examines research studies related to my focus on literature discussions of Latinx literature with Latinx students.

### **Literature Review of Related Research**

Other research on literature and Latinx students by teacher researchers informed my study. Juliá Lopez-Robertson's study (2004): *Making Sense of Literature Through Story: Young Latinas Using Stories as Meaning-Making Devices During Literature Discussions*, and Carmen Martínez-Roldán's study (2000) titled: *The Power of Children's Dialogue: The Discourse of Latino Students in Small Group Literature Discussions*, explored meaningful approaches to conducting research with Latinx students and literature discussions. These dissertations provided insight into how they incorporated literature discussions in their second-grade classrooms as well as how Latinx students interacted with the literature.

Juliá López-Robertson (2004) examines the importance of story. As a Latina, she believes that sharing stories is important to the Latinx community and to how stories lead to making meaning. López-Robertson conducted teacher research in her bilingual second-grade classroom using literature discussion circles, observing five Latinx girls' response to literature related to Latinx experiences.

López-Robertson explored two questions. The first question asked about experiences that the Spanish-speaking girls brought from their lives to share in literature discussions, where the second question, sought to understand how those stories supported the girls in making meaning of the text and their lives. López Robertson (2004) stated that many times, children at a young age are disregarded as critical thinkers. As the teacher and researcher, she wanted to invite students to explore the literature and share the value of storytelling as an act of critical thinking.

*Children's ways of constructing literacy should not be seen as an obstacle to their education. This teacher research study looks at a way of responding to text that has been devalued in school contexts-responding through telling stories rather than through analytical talk. Specifically this study addresses the issue of story as a means of constructing meaning through the sharing of life experience as part of literature*

*discussions in my bilingual second grade classroom with five Spanish speaking girls. (p.18)*

Thus, her study explores the stories that the five girls shared throughout the literature discussions. As she examines the dialogue and interactions between the girls' stories and the group and the books, she describes the content of the stories, along with how the stories connect to the text, and how the stories shine light into the lives of the five girls. López-Robertson (2004) adds,

*Stories, therefore, invite us into the child's life and help us understand how children perceive their own existence as they try to make sense of the world and their place in it. Stories are a true part of the self, the inner child. Through stories the children are sharing a part of themselves while simultaneously constructing that self. (p.24)*

Exploring the stories the five girls shared permitted López-Robertson to learn more about the girls, their stories, and their meaning making. At the same time, these stories and explorations gave the girls opportunities to reflect on issues that affected them:

*The stories told by the five girls in this study were anything but 'cute and transparent' their stories presented real-life circumstances and concerns that at times were a little challenging to discuss. Through their stories they also questioned the events in their lives and they also gained an appreciation for their lived through experiences.(p. 246).*

Storytelling played a crucial role in this study to explore how students at a young age can engage in critical thinking to formulate powerful discussions through their stories. For the girls in the classroom, these experiences allowed the girls to share their voices. At the same time, López-Robertson adds that because the girls shared their stories with each other, this allowed them to see similarities and make connections to one another. Thus, "The life stories the girls shared helped them understand the text and also allowed them to step away from their lives, if only briefly, and reflect on, think about and see connections between the events in their lives so far" (p. 244).

Stories are valuable to share in the classroom. Not only do students feel heard, but their stories lead students to reflect on themselves. For López-Robertson, sharing stories gave opportunities to build relationships with students while learning from them. In return, students valued themselves and were attentive to each other's stories. In addition, sharing stories allowed students to independently make sense of their experiences. Julia López-Robertson (2004) states,

*Creating a distance from their families helped them see things through their eyes and not through those of their parents. In reflecting upon unpleasant circumstances, the girls were able to create distance which allowed them to free themselves from the emotional constraints of the event and attempt to reflect upon the experience in a more removed manner. (p.227)*

For students, taking steps to share stories enabled them to be independent from the influence of adults. Students shared stories that allowed them to make sense of the topics, books, and stories they discussed. The students were engaged in critical thinking through the questioning and interaction among the five girls. For López-Robertson (2004), this sharing and space for critical thinking was important. She states,

*Too often with the test frenzy that we are all wrapped up in (whether we choose to be or not), children are being silenced; children are not being allowed to share their voices, and they are not being asked to think. (p.254)*

López-Robertson clearly notes that these second-grade students were able to think critically about the books and topics discussed through storytelling. López-Robertson's study is a reminder of the power of storytelling, especially for the five Latinx girls who engaged with the literature discussions. Storytelling is a way of making meaning can become a powerful tool in the classroom space.

Carmen Martínez-Roldán (2000) also conducted work around literature discussion circles. She collaborated with Julía López-Robertson, prior to López-Robertson's teacher



research. In this collaboration, both Martínez-Roldán and López-Robertson pushed to create spaces and opportunities for students to think critically and engage in powerful literature discussions on texts that supported students in making connections to Latinx experiences.

Martínez-Roldán (2000) had become aware of the low expectations many educators held for Latinx students. For Martínez-Roldán, it was imperative to conduct research where she could invite students to participate in literature discussion circles and engage in deep discussions. She looked at the types of response students have to literature discussions, and at the content or issues discussed by students.

Martínez-Roldán worked with López-Robertson to create spaces for literature discussion circles. From collecting books around Latinx experiences for the second grade bilingual classroom to creating spaces for dialogue, Martinez-Roldán states that creating spaces for Latinx students to discuss books brings value to students' lives and experiences. Martinez-Roldán found that students who were Spanish speakers made more connections to the Latinx books than students who were dominant English speakers. In that relationship, she found that students who were first generation connected more than students who were second or third generations of living in the United States. Students that recently came into the United States were mostly likely to connect with the issues on immigration than those students who had not had this experience.

In her analysis, Martínez-Roldán found that students made connections in their literary discussions to other books, to themselves, and to television shows. In her analysis she coded the types of discussions and interactions students had along with the connections they made. The data consisted of analyzing audio recordings as well as sketch to stretch artifacts. Martinez-Roldán (2000) states,

*If we do not provide a context and a safe environment to support such discussions, we might be contributing to leaving children unprepared to talk about and deal with those*

*issues, which may result in their uncritical acceptance of how dominant ideologies conceptualize those issues. (p.342)*

Martínez-Roldán emphasizes the importance and value of the discussions as students discussed discrimination on race, gender, the border, families, and so forth. The discussions clearly represented the powerful thinking of second graders. She states, “Small group literature discussions provide a safe environment where children-and—teachers take risks in reflecting on complex issues that matter to them without the concerns of being evaluated or judged” (p. 447).

In many ways, the interactions of students with the books encouraged them to think and explore the real-world situations and events affecting them. Due to this interaction and engagement, Martinez-Roldán adds that the classroom community built stronger relationships among students as the dialogue and interactions allowed students to reflect and think about themselves and those around them. She argues,

*Classroom relations and literature discussions nurtured the ongoing development of cultural identity, voice, participation, solidarity, and individual collective empowerment since the students had an opportunity through the literature circles and through other curricular activities to express their voices and to make many decisions related to the books they wanted to read, the groups they wanted to be a part of, and the language they wanted to use. (p. 476)*

This research validated the importance of taking risks in the classroom. Martinez-Roldán adds, “The students knew we trusted they had something to say about the books, and so they took risks and shared their ideas” (p. 477). This meant a lot for Martinez-Roldán as she describes the importance of implementing a curriculum that both enhances critical thinking in the classroom and the cultural identities that students bring with them. She believes that the value of these literature discussions in her work and for many educators is that literacy can play an important role and it is through taking risks that educators and students can work together to

create meaningful opportunities to value and validate who they are in the classroom, stating once again, that all students, must always be held to high expectations because they are more than capable to meet them.

Christina P. DeNicolò and María E. Franquiz (2006) examine literature discussion circles using multicultural literature. The study observes the discussion around the book *Felita* by Nicholasa Mohr (1979) and many other multicultural books. In the book, the main character Felita is approached by girls in her neighborhood who use racial slurs against her. The study observed the discussion the girls in the fourth-grade classroom had about this book noting strong emotions about the event. In the study, Ms. Lynn, the teacher in the study, shares her determination in encouraging student voice and pride for their identities, culture, and knowledge.

DeNicolò and Franquiz (2006) argue the importance of multicultural literature citing both Harris (2003) and Bishop (1997), finding that multicultural books allow students to see their aspects of culture, language, beliefs, and attitudes. In addition, DeNicolò and Franquiz (2006) find that multicultural literature highlights the characters' cultures and presents students with dynamic and authentic communications they can relate to. In their analysis of the girls' dialogue, they find,

*A profound change occurred in the literature discussion group after the critical encounter, they took turns looking for small details about characters, events, and the evolving story lines. After the encounter, literature circle roles were abandoned for the most part and all members of the group constructed meaning by becoming active participants in the discussion. (p.165)*

DeNicolò and Franquiz note a profound shift in the communication of the girls. The girls had first discussed the events in the book responding with violent comments of things they would do if they were in the character's position. However, after much reflection, they found that responding violently isn't the only way. This provided students with a new perspective of the

situation. DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) state, “The students’ interest in understanding the story and meaningful solutions motivated them to prioritize voice over roles, listen to one another, and identify their own reactions” (p.167). This article described the importance of having spaces for students to discuss books that are relevant and that also share other cultures with the books explored in the classroom. They state,

*Multicultural literature in conjunction with teacher facilitation and modeling can support students’ understanding of these tensions and what they mean. Through the reading of realistic narratives such as Felita, students are provided with opportunities to reflect on a variety of solutions to critical encounters about thorny social issues. (p.168)*

This study is a reminder of the value of integrating multicultural literature and creating spaces in the classroom for students to engage with the literature, as DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) share the critical aspect for students to dialogue and read books that are relevant to students’ lives. They add that literature discussions with multicultural literature provides students with opportunities to use their language and value their lives and those around them.

María E. Franquiz, Antonieta Avila, and Brenda Ayala Lewis (2013) cite Anzaldua’s concept of *nepantla*, which comes from the nauthl language, to share the pedagogical framework that influenced their study. In the study, Franquiz, et.al., (2013) explore two Latinx teachers, Ms. Barrera and Ms. Nava, observing *nepantla*, which is defined as a space of betweenness, where one person or a group of people can cross to a state of great awareness and shifting possibilities. Anzaldua’s work speaks to transformation and the concept of *conocimiento*, which informed the study as Franquiz, et.al., observed the interaction among the teachers creating spaces for their students to discuss two books from Anzaldua: *Friends from the other side/Amigos del otro lado* (1993) and *Prietita and the ghost woman/Prietita y la Llorona* (1997).

In that work, the educators' dialogue with students is observed as much as the dialogue of the students' interactions with the book, their teacher, and peers. What is found is a strong relationship built with the teachers and students through their dialogue. For example, as Ms. Barrera and Ms. Nava previewed the texts and posed questions, students posed questions themselves, and teachers responded through questioning and thinking with students. This became a valuable point in the study because students created learning with their teacher. The teacher did not become the beholder of learning and knowledge, instead, both teachers brought and validated students' prior knowledge.

For example, in Ms. Nava's classroom, students engaged in science by using the book *Prietita and the ghost woman/Prietita y la Llorona*. In that study, Ms. Nava allowed students to go home and explore some of the medicinal practices done at home as well as bring any plants used at home to the classroom to explore them closely in class. Students' herbs and remedies shared in the classroom provided students with opportunities to value and acknowledge one another and learn from each other. The students became the experts. On the other hand, in Ms. Barrera's class, where the book *Friends from the other side/Amigos del otro lado* was explored, students found it valuable to talk about immigration and crossing the Rio Grande. They discussed the term *mojado* and shared with their teacher stories they have heard about crossing the border from Mexico into the U.S., in this case, Texas.

In both studies, Franquiz, et.al., (2013) find that educators who take the time to become nepantlera educators, teachers who provide opportunities for students to be in the betweenness of great awareness and shifting perspective, produce critical learning opportunities for students, specifically Latinx students to think critically about themselves and their world in relation to their schooling. Franquiz, et.al., (2013) cite Valenzuela (1999) agreeing on her pedagogy of

providing a caring classroom for Latinx students to feel valued and validated. They add that nepantleras provide that caring aspect in schooling because students feel welcomed. They state,

*In both classrooms, students were provided with opportunities to communicate personal and familial thoughts about the contexts and content in children's literature, to become active listeners and speakers, and open their minds to new or fuller perspectives. Students were also asked to author their understandings of justice and injustice. (p.152)*

Franquiz, et.al., (2013) add that there are two different types of teachers. Teachers who provide aesthetic caring and authentic caring. They state that some teachers provide aesthetic caring, care about meeting the standards, the curriculum, and the learning that needs to be done. Whereas in authentic caring, educators are aware of the standards and the learning, but they place students' learning first. Teachers work towards the needs of the students versus the needs of the curriculum.

*When teachers, such as Ms. Barrera and Ms. Nava, take the path of conocimiento, they have examined themselves for ideological and political clarity. They commit themselves to authentic caring as they invite their students to examine borders in order to initiate a cycle of inquiry that blurs linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary knowledge. (p.154)*

The study is a reminder that authentic caring is not just caring for students and who they are, but also a political act, as teachers face injustices in the educational system with a high focus on curriculum instead of students as knowledge holders and human beings. Their work emphasizes the importance of taking a stand and acting towards social justice for students.

In *Bilingual Review*, May 2017, the article "The Latinx Family: Learning y La Literatura at the Library" was examined. In that review, the library program three Latinx professors established was titled "cuentos para la familia program". In that work, Davila, Nogueron, and Vasquez-Domínguez (2017), three professors in the study, looked at the reading experiences they were providing for Latinx families at the library. Some families could not drive to the library for the program and the professors took initiative to get transportation for the families. In the

engagement with the books and the families, the professors noted high interest from both family members and the children. The children begged to come to the library to engage with more literature. The parents found the literature new as they had never read or seen books that expressed similar stories to their traditions or cultures. The stories became gateways for discussions that were relevant to families as they shared similar stories and experiences with children and other adults in the program.

In that study, Davila, et. Al (2017) looked at the way this program enhanced the community as more and more adults began sharing their experiences with others. The review acknowledges that “For them, the presence of Latinx literature, facilitators, and fellow immigrant families contributed to a linguistically-and culturally-welcoming experience that validated transnational knowledge and biliteracy in concert with the public resources available in the local community” (p. 9). The study is a reminder that Latinx community members feel empowered and interested in spaces where they feel validated and heard.

Mark A. Lewis and Margarita Gómez Zisselsberger (2018) explore diverse book clubs and the concept of scaffolding in a sixth-grade classroom. In the study, Lewis and Zisselsberger, note that teachers and students engaged in book clubs find valuable opportunities to discuss questions, concerns, or thoughts about the books being read, but, they also found that there can be disadvantages for emergent bilinguals in discussion groups in the book clubs. For instance, native English speakers were found to speak above emergent bilinguals. Where native English speakers held the floor in the discussion more to their emergent bilingual peers. In addition, the teacher, whom they called Ms. M, posed questions to emergent bilinguals more than she did for native English speakers. This made emergent bilinguals such as Veronica become more silent in the discussion than her peers. Due to the consistent questioning of Ms. M, Veronica’s native

English speaker peers also found her talk questionable and many indeed questioned Veronica's stance in her discussion of the book.

Ms. M also restated most of her emergent bilingual's comments in the discussions in comparison to native English speakers' comments. This was done on her behalf to scaffold, but Lewis and Zisselsberger (2018) state that over scaffolding can lead emergent bilinguals to become silenced in the classroom space. Lewis and Zisselsberger (2018) examine the roles of teachers and students in the book clubs, by examining the transcripts of the discussions held among students and teachers. The discussion showed that bilingual emergent students continue to face difficulty in speaking their thoughts and ideas among their native English speaker peers and teachers. This conflict can have negative impacts on students. They state,

*Although the teachers in this study tried to involve EBs in conversations by asking them directly what they thought, other unwitting practices, such as frequent restating for clarification and questioning their decisions and contributions, reified stereotypes of difference as deficit. In other words, instead of using such scaffolding techniques in positive, genuine ways to bring EBs into the book club discussions, these techniques worked to marginalize and silence EBs, such as how Ms. M limited Veronica's contributions by continually interrupting her to ask questions. (p. 183)*

Lewis and Zisselsberger (2018) note that educators need to evaluate themselves and their positions in order to serve students well. They state that educators need to acknowledge their power structures and create spaces for students to not feel marginalized, instead, feel empowered. They add that educators need to create spaces for students to build community and find value in everyone's contribution to the discussion and classroom setting.

Kamaina Wynter-Hoyte, Eliza Gabrielle Braden, Sanjuana Rodriguez, and Natasha Thornton (2019) argue in their study that relevant and sustaining pedagogies for diverse learners can disrupt marginalization in the classroom and society. In their study, Wynter-Hoyte et.al., investigate the importance of diverse literature. In that investigation, they find that students who



have books that are relevant to who they are can become pathways for students to share their stories and experiences in the classroom. They find that children can create critical spaces and delve into serious discussions about racism and other issues that affect their lives through multicultural books. However, in that analysis, Wynter-Hoyte et.al., find that many books lack relevant concepts or experiences to students' lives. In other words, there are less and less books about Latinx or African American people. They observe the number of published books and find that Latinx and African American or African literature still falls short in a society that has a growing Latinx and African American population.

This lack of literature can become an issue for integrating spaces for students to bring in their experiences to the classroom space. Yet, when educators push towards creating critical relevant and sustaining places, students can become problem-posers and see their surroundings differently. Wynter-Hoyte et. Al, (2019) argue,

*The importance of fostering critical spaces resides in the necessity of bringing deficit-based notions and racism in both our social and educational settings to light, and disrupting the ideologies that present students of color as lacking valuable knowledge, which in turn implies that their lives do not matter. (p. 439)*

The study looks at four authors and studies done with Latinx and African American children, finding that these studies share important discussions about incorporating spaces for marginalized groups to feel welcomed and included in the classroom space. For Wynter-Hoyte et.al., it is imperative that educators have spaces to learn about how they can incorporate multicultural literature, culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies.

Angela Valenzuela (1999) explores what she calls the politics of caring and subtractive schooling at Seguin High School, located in Texas. In her study which took place over the course of two school years between 1992 through 1993, Valenzuela examined the school's engagement with its Latinx, specifically Mexican, Mexican American, and immigrant students. In her study,

she found that the administration and teachers lacked a culturally relevant system. The students at Seguin felt disconnected to teachers and staff. Angela Valenzuela conducted multiple interviews with teachers and students, finding that students felt separated from their teachers and the content being taught in the classrooms. Instead, students were immersed in subtractive schooling, a term created by Valenzuela (1999), to signal that schooling takes away from students' identities. Valenzuela (1999) states,

*School subtracts resources from youth in two major ways. First, it dismisses their definition of education which is not only thoroughly grounded in Mexican culture, but also approximates the optimal definition of education advance by Noddings (1984) and other caring theorists. Second, subtractive schooling encompasses subtractively assimilationist policies and practices that are designed to divest Mexican students of their culture and language. (p. 20)*

Valenzuela argues for the importance and value in implementing a pedagogy of caring, stating that it is only through caring that Mexican students can succeed in school. Students shared that they wished their teachers would care about them. Valenzuela adds, "Caring theory addresses the need for pedagogy to follow from and flow through relationships cultivated between teacher and student" (p. 21).

For the students in this study, having teachers who cared and showed their caring is what they sought the most. It was only through caring that the students would then reciprocate that caring into their education. For students, caring meant learning that invited students. The students found themselves bored and found the learning in the classrooms irrelevant in their lives. Teachers would share stories with students, that students felt were unnecessary. For students, true learning happened when their cultural identities and stories were invited into the classroom. Valenzuela (1999) states, "Rather than building on students' cultural, linguistic, and community-based knowledge schools like Seguin typically subtract these resources" (p.62).

There was a relationship between graduation and the subtractive schooling environment at Seguin. For instance, Valenzuela (1999) shared that students who were dominant Spanish speakers were still required to take a foreign language in high school for their graduation credits. Most students who were Spanish dominant and took Spanish courses at Seguin found that the courses consisted of basic Spanish skills that many had already acquired in their elementary years. The class did not consist of learning content in Spanish, instead it focused on basic speech and writing skills. For students this class was boring, and did not do service to students who already knew the language.

According to the interviews, Valenzuela found that many students shared their concerns with their teachers not having caring for them. Students expressed how teachers taught material that disregarded their identities. Instead, teachers taught the material and didn't bother to create relationships with students. Valenzuela (1999) stresses that students need a caring adult by stating, "Their precondition to caring about school is that they be engaged in a caring relationship with an adult at school" (p. 79).

Students found themselves in conflict with their teachers because of the lack of relationships and care from their teachers. As Mexican, Mexican American, and recent immigrants from Mexico, attaining an education became difficult. Students found discomfort and differences between each other and their peers. In her study, Valenzuela explores this closely as her interviews indicated that Chicanx and Mexican students found themselves conflicted with identity and who was considered a Mexican. Mexican students who had immigrated to the U.S. shared their concerns about the Spanish language. Chicanx's Spanish was seen differently than those coming directly from Mexico. Many stories and cases were explored as students had deep and meaningful conversations with Valenzuela about language, cultural identity, and schooling.

What she finds drastically shows the effect that schooling has on students who do not feel valued. When students feel pushed aside, they refuse to do work and refuse the schooling that does not appreciate who they are. She states,

*What looks to teachers and administrators like opposition and lack of caring, feels to students like powerlessness and alienation. Some students' clear perception of the weakness of their position politicizes them into deliberately conveying an uncaring attitude as a form of resistance not to education, but to the irrelevant, uncaring, and controlling aspects of schooling. (p. 94).*

In addition to interviewing students about their feelings towards school and educators, teachers were also interviewed. In many of the instances that Valenzuela interacted with teachers, she noted the lack of understanding coming from the teachers. Teachers disregarded students and found them troublesome because they were not participating as they should in school. Teachers shared their anger and frustration of students whom they labeled as incompetent and uninterested in school, so why should they bother to teach them? This reaction hurt the schooling of these students, which harmed their interest in education.

Because students did not feel welcomed, they felt that education was unattainable. Students felt it wasn't something they could achieve. Valenzuela (1999) states, "The literature on caring is properly premised on the notion that individuals need to be recognized and addressed as whole beings. All people share a basic need to be understood, appreciated, and respected" (p. 108).

The staff at Seguí also didn't have full control of the school and didn't show respect to students. In her study, Valenzuela discusses some of the chaos that erupted in school because of the lack of responsibility coming from the administration and the adults in the building. The students couldn't perform well in the United States whereas in Mexico many of the students

were able to acquire perfect scores. This caused students distress to know that there was something lacking in schools in the U.S. that was not lacking in Mexico.

Valenzuela shares students' stories and goes into detail about the hardships many students went through outside of school. These events and experiences are meaningful to students and enable them to value each other more. For Valenzuela, the teachers at Seguin did not take these experiences into account. Valenzuela (1999) states, "These kids want the truth. They want sincerity. For the teacher, it's one thing to say you care and it's another thing to show it" (p.113).

Students want to have teachers in their lives who take the time to get to know them and this knowledge and caring supports students in success at school. Valenzuela (1999) proposes that instead of subtractive schooling, schools should work towards what she calls additive schooling (p.269). She argues that schools should embrace the politics of caring and culturally relevant teaching and must bridge and create connections among both teachers and students. It is only then, that Latinx students from different backgrounds, can acquire success in education. One example is Valenzuela's observation of a teacher who made tacos for his students. Mr. Sosa, a teacher at Seguin, went home after work to make taquitos for his students so that they could eat. He explains that he did not do this out of pity, but out of love. Mr. Sosa states, "So, it's not a matter of being a handout. It's a matter of love. They are like my children to me. It's not a handout. It's like giving something without expecting something in return. I don't expect something in return" (p. 113).

The study examines the value of teachers taking the time to create spaces where students can feel cared for, valued, and loved. Valenzuela emphasizes that, only then, will Latinx students find school accessible and achievable. Valenzuela's work is a reminder that schools need to

move away from a subtractive schooling environment and, instead, support students where they are and who they are, through culturally relevant teaching.

Enrique Sepúlveda (2011) explores the experiences and stories of undocumented Mexican students in the U.S. as he integrates critical literacy, poetry and storytelling, using an approach which he terms as the pedagogy of *acompañamiento*. Sepúlveda's research observes the discussions and reflections of undocumented Mexican high school students at Bosque High. Initially, he sought to explore the academic gap undocumented Mexican students face, but discovered that his approach did not reflect or connect to the real-life experiences the students brought into the classroom. The lack of relevant literary experiences for undocumented Mexican students led Sepúlveda to digging deeper into the educational experiences undocumented Mexican students face, in order to create a space where they could bring in personal stories and use critical literacy and poetry as a form of reflection that would allow students to critically discuss and think about their world. Sepúlveda (2011), points out,

*I saw many migrant students disengaged from the learning process in the classroom and many teachers who knew very little of the lives of their students, concerned mainly with curricular content, objectives, and classroom management issues. I felt the school lacked a strong sense of community and belonging. Recently arrived undocumented Mexican migrant students were undergoing severe social dislocation at their new high school and in the community. Most of their teachers were not certified to teach English language learners, and most knew very little of the ruptured lives of migrants and their experiences of transgressions. (p. 555).*

The lack of teachers and resources for undocumented Mexican students at Bosque High, led Sepúlveda to explore and construct spaces that valued students' experiences. In his research, he observed male undocumented Mexican students engaging with poetry. Poetry became a powerful tool for both Sepúlveda and the students as they were able to connect personally and reflect on their lived experiences. Sepúlveda's pedagogy of *acompañamiento* stated that the

teacher did not have more power than students. He defines pedagogy of *acompañamiento* as, “a fellowship and engagement with one another without goals and objectives. It can serve as a foundation for an educational or liberatory project; however, its *raison d’être* is not to accomplish something in the instrumentalist sense” (p.564). He adds that *acompañamiento* leads the educator to losing some of the hierarchical power educators may have and instead promote relationship building among students and educators as students begin to incorporate and create learning with their teachers.

For Sepúlveda, it was imperative that he build relationships with students at Bosque High as a researcher and mediator for the class he was cocreating with students. In his work, he shares poems and stories coming from the undocumented male Mexican students as they expressed immigration, borders, and life in the United States. In his analysis of student responses, he discovers that students share powerful discussions of the U.S. as students think about their experiences. Finding that, undocumented students face many struggles living in the U.S. For one, they face losing family members coming into the U.S. Second, undocumented students express maltreatment working in the U.S. either not getting paid on time to not having a stable job. Finally, undocumented students shared fears that they face living in the U.S. because of the border patrol. In his work, Sepúlveda shares the theoretical frames of critical literacy and the theory of liberation as he references Paulo Freire (1970) and Goizueta (2001).

A major point that Sepúlveda stresses in his work is the power of liberation, building relationships, *acompañamiento*, and reflection. He states that when teachers incorporate learning experiences such as the ones he co-created with students, it not only builds relationships among students and educators, but it can create a sense of liberation as students reflect on their own world. He adds that *acompañamiento* allows students to feel valued and become experts in their

own growth. Finally, reflection becomes transformative as Sepúlveda (2011), states, “When individuals can reflect, think, and write about their most intimate realities, transformation happens on multiple levels—personal, relational, and communal (p. 560).” In his work, he finds value in undocumented Mexican students to co-create meaningful experiences which would otherwise would not be done based on his observations of the lack of teachers to create meaningful spaces for students.

The literature review presented in this section informs my work with Latinx students. These studies are a reminder that studies around Latinx issues are continuous, building on each other. Latinx students still find themselves in situations where schooling involves irrelevant materials and the education they receive may be subtractive of who they are. These studies are reminders that there are gaps in the schooling provided of Latinx students in the United States and that there is work to be done. Latinx students await an education that is both relevant and additive to who they are as a community of people. Thus, the literature presented in this section are crucial cries for more and more work to be done as researchers and educators need to build and co-create spaces for Latinx students to be heard.

### **Overview of Dissertation**

The first chapter of this dissertation looked briefly at my story, which served as my purpose for this study and for becoming an educator. My story is an effort into understanding my experience in school, while at the same time, allowing me to reflect on my experience to create powerful meaningful experiences that I lacked in school. All students should have opportunities to see their cultures and identities reflected and invited in the classroom, books, and the learning content. Everyone’s stories matter and the classroom should reflect that.



The first chapter also briefly looked at the theoretical frame for this paper. The theorists and theories that are associated with this study were explored from theories on transaction to theories on critical pedagogy, each theory interchanges a dialogue on what matters in the educational environment. Culturally responsive, sustaining, and relevant pedagogies were briefly addressed in this chapter to reflect the value of bridging curriculum to students' identities. In addition, funds of knowledge was explored briefly to share the worth of bringing in students' funds of knowledge to the classroom.

This dissertation dives into the teacher research I conducted from January to May 2019 at Las Mariposas Elementary, where I teach. The study focuses on my three research questions, which connect to my experience and interest as both an educator and Latina. The questions are:

1. What social issues do students discuss in literature groups?
2. How do literary response strategies influence student dialogue?
3. How does my theoretical frame influence my decision making as a teacher?

Chapter 2 describes my research design along with data collection and analysis. The first section of chapter 2 looks closely at how my teacher-research design was conducted at Las Mariposas Elementary in the SEI classroom. In addition, chapter 2 looks at the materials and books collected for this study. A timeline for the study along with the list of books used in the study and summaries of the books is included.

Chapter 3 looks at the first two questions of the research study. In the first section of the chapter, the first question on the social issues students discuss, is explored through seven intertwining themes that students found valid and valuable to discuss in their literature discussion circles. These themes revolved around family, borders, dreams and hopes, racism, identity, childism, and fear. Within those themes several subthemes arose and are also explored to share what students found meaningful.

The second section of chapter 3 looks closely at the second question for this study, as I explore how response strategies influenced student dialogue. This section mostly looks at the relationship between the student dialogue and responses to the literature discussion strategies used. For example, how graffiti boards, sketch to stretch, written responses, and student dialogue were used and their influence on the student reflections and discussions.

Chapter 4 describes my approach and reflection on the data and my process for conducting the research through a theoretical lens as I explore the third question for this study on how the theoretical frame influenced my decision making as a teacher.

This dissertation concludes with chapter 5, which summarizes the study and provides future implications. Chapter 5 revisits the three questions explored in this study as well as shares recommendations to myself and other teachers. Chapter 5 summarizes the big ideas of this dissertation, revisiting the powerful voices of the Latinx community at Las Mariposas Elementary.

### **Conclusion**

Like mariposas or butterflies, this study evolves and transcends a beautiful and powerful message of hope. This dissertation serves as a reminder that education, like metamorphosis, can transform students and teachers. Transformation can occur through reflection and action, and growth can occur at various points. Theories inform practice as much as practice can inform the ways in which theories evolve. Taking steps back to reflect enables educators to take steps forward, so that as metamorphosis, pedagogy may also beautifully transform into something completely new.

In order to transform, reflection and action must take place. Throughout this dissertation, Latinx students and I engaged and immersed ourselves in topics and discussions of value and

significance to our lives and world. This work is an extension to conversations about the value of incorporating the value of the Latinx community in the educational setting and a reminder that literature can become a powerful tool in doing so.

## CHAPTER 2:

### **The Process of Conducting Teacher Research in the SEI Classroom Through a Latinx Lens**

*“Being Mexican...means being there for each other. It’s togetherness, like a familia. We should be helping one another, cheering our friends on.”*

*-Guadalupe García McCall*

This chapter focuses on the process of conducting teacher research in a Structured English Immersion (SEI) classroom in which Latinx students along with their peers were invited to discuss and engage with literature that reflected Latinx values, stories, and experiences. The research, conducted from January to May of 2018, shines light into student voices and experiences captured through literature discussion strategies, such as sketch to stretch, graffiti boards, written responses and student dialogue.

The focus of this chapter is to describe the process of designing this teacher research as well as the ways in which the data was collected and analyzed. In the first section of this chapter, I describe my research design as a teacher researcher and how the research was conducted in the SEI classroom as well as the ways in which I collected and found materials students would engage with. In the second section of this chapter, I explain the methodologies used to collect and analyze the data as well as how the data was sorted which evolved into seven intertwining themes, each with its subthemes. The final section of this chapter discusses the methods used to record data, such as teacher reflection weekly memos, a teacher reflection journal, and audio recordings of student discussions.

### **Designing Teacher Research in the SEI Classroom**

Teacher research is a valid and valuable approach to conducting research, allowing teachers to gain an understanding of students and their own pedagogies. According to Ruth Shagoury and Brenda Miller Power (2012), “At it’s best, teacher researcher is a natural extension of good teaching. Observing students closely, analyzing their needs, and adjusting the curriculum to fit the needs of all students have always been important skills demonstrated by fine teachers” (p. 3). Thus, teacher research is a valuable tool that allows teachers to gain an understanding of the experiences students bring to the classroom as well as ways in which teachers can enhance their teaching practices to best approach all students’ needs. Shagoury and Power add, “Unlike large-scale education research, teacher research has a primary purpose of helping the teacher-researcher understand her students and improve her practice in specific, concrete ways” (p. 4). Thus, teacher research is an informative tool for teachers to understand their teaching practices and best meet the needs of students.

It is through teacher research where teaching practices merge with theory and vice versa. The research and theories around education are alive within the classroom intertwining among students and teachers and it is through teacher research that a closer look at theories can be seen. Teacher researchers can design research and collect information and data that extends beyond the theoretical practices, allowing teachers to gain new understandings. Teacher researchers find new understandings of students, teaching practices, and links between the two. Shagoury and Power (2012) state,

*Teacher research challenges many traditional conceptions of the research process and nowhere is the challenge needed more than in considering how we read other research, how we cite who influences our work, and how we connect our research to texts beyond research journals and books. (p. 172)*

Although, teacher research is sometimes questioned as a form of research, Shagoury and Power (2012) argue that teacher research is a valid and valuable form for collecting data. It is through the process of teacher research that teachers explore theories to understand their teaching practices. Theories can evolve from teaching as well as the understanding of the theories can create new teaching practices. Theories are alive through the teaching practices and dialogues occurring within the classroom and students. According to Shagoury and Miller Power (2012), “teachers are their greatest tools to gain an understanding of what is occurring in the classroom” (p. 118). Teachers are constantly learning from students and reflecting on their teaching practices while trying to build pathways to help support students. This constant reflection and application allows teachers to step back and take a closer look at what students need and how teachers can best fit their needs.

Thus, for my purpose and approach to gaining an understanding of students in the SEI classroom, teacher research allows me to reflect on research through my teaching lens while gaining an understanding of students and my pedagogy. Being a teacher conducting and designing research in the classroom, therefore, has value as it not only opens pathways in which a teacher can approach teaching, but how the teacher can approach students and address their needs, values, stories, and experiences through theory and the understanding of the data collected and analyzed. Furthermore, the teacher can create a space of networking through students as they learn about and from each other’s stories. Teacher research enhances classroom community as students and teachers gain deeper understandings of each other and find purpose in what matters most. Henceforth, approaching this research design through this particular lens allows me to look closely at my own teaching and the stories and experiences that all 22 students bring into the classroom and to each other in order to create meaningful gains for research and pedagogy.

In addition, being a Latina teacher researcher has become a crucial layer in my approach of this research as it allows me a deeper insight, reflection, and connection to the discussions, experiences, and understandings deriving from Latinx students and the literature explorations completed during the study. Not only is my lens as a teacher researcher valuable to my approach in designing the research, but also incorporating my lens as a Latina teacher researcher.

### **Designing Research Through the Lens of a Latina Teacher Researcher**

In this section I share two *raíces* or roots for my approach to the research design I conducted as a Latina teacher researcher. The first is my experience as a Latina student and the lack of resources provided to me to support my cultural identity and experiences. The second is my new understandings of theoretical and pedagogical practices that speak to creating experiences for students to think critically, reflect, and take action. These two vital experiences that have become rooted in my pedagogy, that encouraged my approach as a Latina teacher researcher.

Going into the classroom as a Latina teacher myself, I found it crucial to incorporate a culturally responsive and sustaining classroom environment and curriculum for Latinx students in the classroom. As mentioned in the first chapter, I never had an opportunity to read stories that reflected my culture or identity, much less had a teacher who invited me to share my ideas, experiences, or stories. Instead, the curriculum with which I grew up, focused closely on my academic English growth using literature such as *Holes* by Louis Sachar, *The Black Stallion* by Walter Farley, *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White, and so many more to explore literary elements, story plots, and main ideas.

I am not saying these books or the experiences I had with them didn't provide significance. On the contrary, I enjoyed reading these books and many inspired me to fall in love with reading and teaching; however, I never imagined that novels or picturebooks around Latinx experiences existed. It wasn't until graduate and undergraduate classes at The University of Arizona that I was exposed to such books and invited to explore them closely. For the first time I was immersed as a reader who felt connected to the characters read in the pages of the books. Their stories were also my stories. It was through this new experience that I saw my language and culture and overall experience as a Mexican American become a valuable asset to education and to who I am as a person. Books should be invitations for students to hear, feel, see and experience real stories that value and embrace various cultures and stories, that can be or become the stories of its readers.

When students are invited to read and engage with multiple books, they not only see themselves, but they see the world around them. My experience has become a pathway for me to invite Latinx, along with their peers, to connect, reflect, and share their stories with each other. Latinx students do not just benefit from a culturally sustaining and responsive classroom environment, but those who may not be acquainted with the Latinx culture are able to find value in their Latinx peers' stories and experiences. Therefore, my experience growing up became the essence for my interest in designing a research study that would expand on the current curriculum, by inviting and encouraging Latinx stories to come alive in the classroom. Thus, this allowed me to create a text set of and around Latinx experiences and found books that go beyond Latinx cultures, so that students can create and see many other stories outside of their own, while at the same time finding connections to those stories by thinking critically about the human



experience(see Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 for the texts used for small groups and whole group read alouds).

As a result, my design process began with my own personal experience and with my need and desire to share with the students as a teacher and as a Latina, that books around Latinx experiences do exist so that they too feel connected to the characters and their stories and feel valued within the school's curriculum. Now being the teacher of mostly Latinx students, it was imperative that I create a curriculum that invites Latinx stories and share the resources and knowledge I have gained through my graduate and undergraduate experiences.

In addition to my personal experiences, theoretical work around literature became a gateway for me to see the value of having diverse literary experiences to create meaningful connections to the experiences of students as presented in chapter 1 and revisited in chapter 4. By interweaving the theories of Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017) on *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)* and *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)* with Ladson Billings, Louis Moll, et. Al's *Funds of Knowledge*, and Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* I built a framework for myself as a teacher researcher in this study.

### **Context for the Study**

It is important to note the influence the community may have on neighboring schools. In this brief section, a glimpse of the neighborhood surrounding the location of the study is explored. The study took place in South Tucson, a neighborhood surrounded by a rich Latin culture, where stories and tunes of Latin and Mexican music fill the air. The neighborhood is filled with vibrant colors and murals across shop walls depicting images of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, and shops sell Mexican food and provide services for the community. In the neighborhood there is a train track where the train passes every hour, and a hospital and fire

station are nearby. Homes, each with bright colors depicting the sunsets of the desert, surround a neighboring school, the location of the study. The *barrio* or neighborhood has a rich history where parades of rodeos have taken place and *piñatas* have been cracked in the street by neighboring children to share the joy of the new year. The neighboring Catholic Church plays a big part of the community as neighbors come together for religious celebrations and winter holidays.

The *barrio* is an essential aspect for students as these experiences form part of their identity. Although the primary language spoken by the neighborhood is Spanish, many are bilingual and speak English. The community is a central part of the school and the lives of the children. It has also been a central part of my upbringing and family, as this neighborhood has been a part of my family for three generations. As a result, growing up in the neighborhood myself has allowed me the opportunity to value my cultural identity and the importance of being Mexican American. It is through my experience as a member of the community that I connect, share, and reflect on the Latinx experience in the Southwest, specifically in education as I too am part of the neighborhood and was a student and now am a teacher in my neighborhood school Mariposa Elementary. My relationship to the community, my cultural identity, and education informed my stance in creating spaces as a teacher researcher for students to be invited to share who they are with each other in the classroom through children's literature around Latinx experiences.

### **School Context**

Las Mariposas Elementary School had a total of 200 students enrolled at the time of the study and is located in a large school district. About 98% of the student population identified as Latinx, where most students identified as Hispanics, Mexican American, and/or Mexican. Only

2% of the students identified as other. About 99% of the students received free or reduced lunch as it is a Title I school. Many students at Las Mariposas speak more than one language; for many, Spanish is their first language and English is their second language. There are very few monolinguals who only speak English as many students are bilingual speakers. The same is true for monolinguals in Spanish, there are only about 2 to 3% of students only speaking Spanish. The rest of the student population speak both English and Spanish, although Spanish would be considered their first and primary language for many at home.

Las Mariposas Elementary has a dual language program which offers students bilingual education, so that students may learn or continue to learn and use both English and Spanish in all subject areas. In addition, the school has a program called Opening the Mind through the Arts (OMA), where students take art classes, such as dance, art, orchestra, violins, and choir. In addition to these two programs, the school also has English Language Development (ELD) classes for students whose first language is Spanish and need support in acquiring academic English based on students' AZELLA scores, a state test on students' ability to use academic English. The school also has a Structured English Immersion (SEI) classes for students whose first language is Spanish, but where English Language Learners can be immersed with mainstream students or students who have acquired academic English.

An ELD class has an enforced 4-hour block from the state, where students learn Academic English within those hours. Students have blocks of grammar and vocabulary, reading and oral English conversation, as well as writing instruction in English. Whereas in the SEI classroom, English Learners and English speakers are placed together, English Learners are pulled out by an instructor who uses small group instruction to target the same skills presented in an ELD classroom. The purpose of the SEI classroom is for English Learners to be immersed

with English speakers. An SEI classroom results from having low enrollment in the school or low enrollment of English Language Learners. An ELD classroom mostly consists of English Language Learners while an SEI classroom will have few English Language Learners and a good amount of proficient English speakers. Mariposa Elementary also offers mainstream classes, which are classes for students who are proficient in English and proficient bilinguals to learn the regular curriculum offered in many schools.

### **Classroom Context**

During the time of the research, the classroom in which the research took place was a Structured English Immersion classroom. The implementation of some aspects of the 4-hour block were required, meaning the teacher had to implement reading, writing, grammar, and English oral conversation instruction, but the teacher could also use the *mainstream* curriculum to target other academic English skills, especially for the non-English learners in the classroom. This meant that for this classroom, students who were English Language Learners were pulled out by a specialist for an hour daily. As the teacher, I was required to use differentiated learning to meet students' needs in English.

Not only did the research take place in a Structured English Immersion (SEI) classroom for which I was the teacher, but it was also a combination classroom for fourth and fifth grade students. Thus, not only was I required to support English Language Learners through differentiated instruction, for their acquisition of English, but I also had to teach two different curriculums.

The classroom consisted of 15 fifth grade students and 7 fourth grade students during the time of the research. For the purpose of this dissertation and the protection of student identity, all names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms. Prior to the research, I had most of these

students the year before as their third and fourth grade teacher for the 2017-2018 school year. The only difference was that the classroom for the 2017-2018 school year was an ELD classroom, meaning there were more English Learners. For the 2018-2019 school year, the classroom transitioned to an SEI classroom environment due to the number of students enrolled, so we were able to have English speakers in the classroom. With this transition, the class the year before which had 17 students, now consisted of a class total of 22 students. For the 2018-2019 school year at the time of the study, the class received five new students. Three of those students spoke only English: María, Aren and Ally. María came from a Latinx family, both parents speaking Spanish, but she had not acquired the language. Her first and only language at the time of the study was English. Aren and Ally identified as white and only spoke English, although they were eager to learn Spanish. The other 2 new students spoke Spanish. Juan spoke Spanish fluently whereas Lili spoke a little bit of Spanish, her dominant language being English.

For the rest of the class, the students spoke Spanish as their first language and English was their second language. One student spoke only Spanish as he was new to the United States. Vicente had come from Mexico and was adjusting to the U.S. Most of the students identified as Latinx, specifically Mexican American and/or Mexican, and one student, Paula, was from El Salvador.

As for the classroom and school curriculum, the students were required to have at least 2 hours of reading and writing instruction and 2 hours of math instruction. At the time of the study, Guided Reading was strictly enforced for all grade levels as the school's goal was to improve students' reading levels. Most of the students in the school had been labeled as reading below grade level, thus, teachers were required to have students work with leveled reading, reading intervention, and to implement guided reading instruction and groups daily. At the same time,

data and tests were highly emphasized during the school year. Students were required to take tests weekly and teachers were to evaluate the data as well as create tests weekly.

A weekly test for math was also required. Teachers were expected to look at the data and planning was emphasized as the goal was to create instruction that would improve math scores. The scores that the school sought to improve were not solely focused on district benchmarks (given every quarter, after nine weeks), but to improve AZmerit scores for both math and ELA which came from the state of Arizona in April.

With so much planning and emphasis on raising test scores, teachers were observed weekly and some daily. During the time of the study, I found myself and the block of time I had scheduled for the study to take place continuously interrupted because of the demand to raise scores. The constant interruptions shortened the literature discussions and reading experiences and, with so much testing and AZmerit being assessed in the month of April with much preparation in March, the time for gathering data was limited. Therefore, there was more data collected before March than after.

### **Research Questions and Book Selection**

Based on the school context, my personal experiences, and my knowledge of the theories and theorists around literacy and education, I developed three research questions to explore:

1. What social issues do students discuss in literature groups?
2. How do literary response strategies influence student dialogue?
3. How does the theoretical frame influence my decision making as a teacher?

These questions examine the opportunities of Latinx students to share their stories, reflections, and experiences with others in the classroom. At the same time, the study was an

opportunity to learn from Latinx students and non-Latinx students' conversations. As mentioned earlier, I did not have opportunities to read books that reflected my stories or experiences, much less have conversations around them. Thus, it was imperative that I explore the discussions and experiences created for the Latinx and non-Latinx students in the classroom. Knowing theory and research impacted my approach to the study and what I considered worth exploring throughout the course of collecting and analyzing the data. Theory also informs me as both the teacher and researcher of my own practices and approaches.

### Selection of Books

It was crucial to know which books would be a part of the dialogue in the literature discussions in the classroom during the study. Going back to the purpose of the study and my own personal experiences, I selected books that closely reflected or shared experiences around the Latinx culture, but at the same time, some books were also selected because they connected to Latinx experiences while, at the same time, reflecting another culture. The following books were selected in the process as they addressed Latinx experiences, events, cultural aspects, or shared a connection to Latinx understandings. Table 2.1 shares the titles of books along with summaries of the books, authors, illustrators and a short summary of the authors and illustrators for each book.

**Table 2.1 Titles of books and book pairings.**

Pairs of Books	Title	Author and Illustrator	Summary
Pair 1	<i>Dreamers</i>	Yuyi Morales	<i>Dreamers</i> follows the journey of a mother and her son crossing the border. The book shares their experience getting acquainted in their new home as they are surrounded by unknown words in a different language. The

			mother and her infant son, find refuge among the books and strive in creating their own story.
Pair 1	<i>The Journey</i>	Francesca Sanna	This book follows a mother and her two children leaving their country to go to a new one since they face danger if they stay. In the journey, the mother and her children face borders and have to overcome the dangers of leaving their country to go to a new one.
Pair 1	<i>Migrant</i>	Maxine Trottier	This book follows a girl and her family as they move from place to place like the butterflies for work.
Pair 2	<i>Mamá The Alien</i>	René Laínez Laura Lacámara	In this book, Sofia finds her mother's residency card, where the term alien, appears. Sofia thinks her mother is a real alien and after discussing with her mother, she finds that this identification card doesn't mean that her mom is an alien.
Pair 2	<i>Dear Primo</i>	Duncan Tonatiuh	In this book, two cousins write letters to each other about their lives as one cousin lives in Mexico and the other in California. The boys share what they do during the day as the book's illustration compares and contrast the setting of the two boys' homes.
Pair 3	<i>Two White Rabbits</i>	Jairo Buitrago  Illustrated by: Rafael Yockteng	In this book a girl describes her journey with her father as they attempt to cross the border. It follows the girls and her father from getting on the train's rooftop, known as <i>la bestia</i> to her father working to provide money to continue on their journey. On the trip, the girl counts objects, animals, and things seen.
Pair 3	<i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i>	Duncan Tonatiuh	Pancho Rabbit and his family throw a party for his father as they await his return from the U.S. When Pancho Rabbit's father does not come to the party, Pancho Rabbit decides to look for his father instead and attempts to cross the desert and border to find him with the help of the coyote. The coyote, however, betrays Pancho Rabbit and tries to harm him. Luckily, Pancho Rabbit's father comes to his aid and the family is reunited once more.
Pair 4	<i>Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match</i>	Monica Brown  Illustrated by:	Marisol is American Peruvian and she doesn't match. She gets called on it by her peers and teacher. She is dared to match but finds that it is boring and Ms. Apple tells her



		Sara Palacios	that not matching makes Marisol who she really is. Marisol learns to value who she is and gets a dog at the end of the story that doesn't match just like her.
Pair 4	<i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i>	Juana Martinez-Neal	Alma thinks about her name. In this book, Alma's name history is explored and Alma learns to value her name.
Pair 5	<i>Drawn Together</i>	Minh Lé  Illustrated by: Dan Santat	In this picturebook a boy and his grandfather spend time together. But, neither know each other's language to communicate. Through the use of art and illustration, the grandfather and his grandson learn to communicate and find each other's company valuable.
Pair 5	<i>I Love Saturdays y Domingos</i>	Alma Flor Ada	This book follows a girl who visits her two sets of grandparents on the weekend. Her grandparents are different from each other. Her grandparents from her mother's side are Hispanic where on her father's side her grandparents are white. As she celebrates her birthday she shares her love for both sets of grandparents as they share their love for her.
Pair 5	<i>A Different Pond</i>	Bao Phi	This book follows a father and his son visiting a pond as the father shares his story with his son. The son and the father learn to acknowledge each other more through this relationship building as new and old collide.
Pair 6	<i>Pepita Talks Twice</i>	Ofelia Dumas Lachtman	Pepita doesn't want to talk Spanish. She feels frustrated that she has to talk twice and translate everything. Her teachers and parents tell her the importance of being bilingual, but she is resistant. It isn't until one day, her dog <i>lobo</i> encounters an incident that Pepita learns to value both of her languages-including Spanish.
Pair 6	<i>The Upside Down Boy</i>	Juan Felipe Herrera  Illustrated by: Elizabeth Gómez	This book follows Juanito who just moved to the U.S. and is scared to learn English, but with the help of his teacher, he learns to love writing poems and sharing his beautiful voice.
Pair 7	<i>Calling The Doves</i>	Juan Felipe Herrera  Illustrated by: Elly Simmons	This story follows Juanito who shares his life with his family as migrant farm workers. He shares his mother's love for singing and his father's gift for calling the doves as he recalls his early beginnings in Texas.

Pair 7	<i>My Diary from Here to There</i>	Amada Irma Perez  Illustrated by: Maya Christina González	Amada is moving to the states, specifically Texas. In her journey she leaves her family behind and her best friend Michi. She writes about her journey from the beginning to the end as she writes down her emotions about her journey to the U.S. and missing Michi, but becoming a stronger person.
Pair 8	<i>Me and My Fear</i>	Francesca Sanna	This book follows a girl who has moved into a new country with a little friend called fear. She shares how fear keeps getting bigger and bigger and makes it harder for her. But, when a boy introduces himself, she makes a friend and fear gets smaller as she realizes that everyone has a fear of their own.
Pair 8	<i>The Day War Came</i>	Nicola Davies  Illustrated by: Rebecca Cobb	In this book, a girl faces a war. She goes to school and finds that war disrupts her life. As she runs to find refuge, she finds the way war has taken over people, homes, and families. She wants to go to school and through the help of a boy, she and other children, find chairs to join a school to learn.
Pair 9	<i>Somos Como Las Nubes</i>	Jorge Argueta  Illustrated by: Alfonso Ruano	This book is a collection of verses of different stories of people crossing the border from Latin America into the U.S. and their struggles, dreams, and hopes.
Pair 9	<i>I'm New Here</i>	Anne Sibley O'Brien	This book follows three students coming from different countries learning to speak English in the United States as they are new to the U.S. They find it difficult to start living in the U.S. as they face many obstacles but with help start to feel more at home.
Pair 10	<i>I Pledge Allegiance</i>	Pat Mora  Illustrated by: Patrice Barton	Libby is learning the Pledge of Allegiance at school while her great aunt Lobo is learning the Pledge and reciting questions for her citizenship ceremony. Both work together to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
Pair 10	<i>Carmela Full of Wishes</i>	Matt de La Peña  Illustrated by: Christian Robinson	It's Carmela's birthday. She is excited to join her brother to do laundry. As she walks by, she spots a dandelion and is told that she can make a wish. She imagines all the possible wishes, but accidentally falls and her dandelion crashes down. She is sad, but her brother takes her to a place where she can

			make many more wishes. She does but is told not to tell.
Pair 11	<i>Separate is Never Equal</i>	Duncan Tonatiuh	This story follows a true account of the situation the Méndez family went through as they were told not to go to the Westminster school because of her physical appearance. The family fights for desegregation and for Sylvia to join school just like everyone else.
Pair 11	<i>Thank You Omu</i>	Oge Mora	Omu is making a delicious stew. As she reads a boy knocks on the door and asks for some. Soon a police officer asks for some. Omu made enough so she thought she might share and then enjoy her dinner later. But, as the day goes, more and more visitors appear to ask for more. Soon, her stew is all gone. Then there are multiple knocks on the door and it is everyone she shared with. They bring food for Omu and a card thanking her.
Pair 12	<i>Imagine</i>	Juan Felipe Herrera  Illustrated by: Lauren Castillo	This book follows Juan's journey growing up from picking chamomile flowers to dreaming about the possibilities and writing throughout school. This book is a reminder to dream and picture a future that you can work towards.
Pair 12	<i>The Streets are Free</i>	Kurusa  Illustrated by: Monika Doppert	This story follows the true story of the children from San Jose de la Urbina in Venezuela where there are no parks and children play in the streets. So, they get friends and family and community members together to make a difference for a space they can call their own.
Pair 13	<i>Drum Dream Girl</i>	Margarita Engle  Illustrated by: Rafael López	Drum dream girl dreams of drumming drums, but only boys can do that. She faces obstacles where many tell her that drumming is for boys only. With the support of her father and family, she pushes through and drums with her heart as she dreams of drumming and is able to get a teacher to teach her. As she drums, many dance, to her drumming as she changes drumming to be for both boys and girls.
Pair 13	<i>Emmanuel's Dream</i>	Laurie Ann Thompson  Illustrated by: Sean Qualls	Emmanuel is born with only one fully developed leg. He is told that he cannot do anything, but his mother tells him he can and pushes him to go to school, but suddenly gets very ill. Emmanuel, behind his mother's

			wishes, begins to work to support his family as his siblings were too young. He encounters challenges, such as his mother dying and people not giving him a job, but through his determination and the help of a foundation he finds support, gets a new bike, helmet, and socks, and pushes himself to make a difference in the world.
Pair 14	<i>Islandborn</i>	Junot Diaz  Illustrated by: Leo Espinosa	Lola has an assignment to draw a picture representing her birthplace. She has never been to the island before though. She tries to remember as much as she can, but can't. Instead she interviews everyone she knows who comes from the island and draws those images for her assignment and realizes that the island is in her.
Pair 14	<i>Going Home</i>	Eve Bunting  Illustrated by: David Díaz	Christmas time is coming and Carlos and his family are going to Mexico for a visit. However, Mexico feels different, but Carlos learns to value how much Mexico means to him and his family.
Pair 15	<i>From North to South</i>	René Laínez	José is going to visit his mom in Mexico. She used to live in Sand Diego with José and his dad, but one day at the factory, she was asked to see her papers and the border patrol sent her back to Mexico. José is now looking forward to seeing his mom and spending time with her. On his last night with her, he dreams of her having her papers and crossing the border together.
Pair 15	<i>Friends from the Other Side</i>	Gloria Anzaldua  Illustrated by: Consuelo Méndez	Prietita meets a boy named Joaquín who is from Mexico. The boys in the neighborhood call him “mojado” meaning wetback as many immigrants cross a river to come to the United States. Prietita notices that Joaquín has some sores on his arms and she takes him to the herb woman. After days of spending time together and receiving healing from the herb woman, Prietita and Joaquín hear neighbors shout “la migra” which is the border patrol. Prietita takes Joaquín and his mother to the herb woman to hide. The patrol leave and Joaquín and his mother are safe. The story ends with Prietita ready to learn how to use herbal medicine.

Pair 16	<i>Super Cilantro Girl</i>	Juan Felipe Herrera  Illustrated by: Honorio Robledo Tapia	Esmeralda misses her mother who is back in Mexico while she is in the U.S. her last name is sinfronteras which means without borders. She misses her mother and wants her to come back. One night, Esmeralda has a dreamt that she becomes this green giant. She calls herself supercilantro girl and uses her powers to get her mother and bring her back home. She grows out vines to cover the borders and buildings so that there are no more borders. When she wakes up from this dream, her grandmother tells her there is a surprise in the living room. It is her mother. A bird pecks at the glass and flies away freely, without borders.
Pair 16	<i>America is Her Name</i>	Luis J. Rodriguez  Illustrated by: Carlos Vásquez	In the barrio of Chicago, América is unhappy in school until a poet comes to visit the class, América begins to feel inspired and writes beautiful poems that remind her that she can succeed in being herself. She learns the importance of her identity and culture.
Pair 17 Whole class read alouds	<i>Undocumented: A Worker's Fight</i>	Duncan Tonatiuh	In this book, undocumented workers fight for their rights as many are underpaid, work extra hours, and are treated unfairly at work. This book follows Juan and his situation as he works for justice for himself and many others who are treated unfairly at work.
Pair 17 Whole class read alouds	<i>Waiting for Papá</i>	René Colato Laínez  Illustrated by: Anthony Accardo	Beto misses his father who had to stay behind in El Salvador since only he and his mother got papers and his father had not. Beto goes to school and learns about what an immigrant is and shares his story with his teacher. In class they paint shirts with special paint and the teacher brings in a gentleman from the radio station. Beto's mom works hard to get a lawyer for Betos dad, but it is through the radio and the support of loved ones that Beto's message reaches his father and he gets to see him again.
Pair 17 Whole class read alouds	<i>Amelia's Road</i>	Linda Jacobs Altman	Amelia is constantly moving from place to place based on the seasons since her family are migrant farmworkers. They need to move in order to pick the crops at their appropriate seasons, but she feels like she doesn't have a stable home. One day she finds a road that leads to a tree where she plants a memory

			box, and draws a picture of a house by the tree for her classroom assignment. Amelia must move again, but the box stays buried by the tree.
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In addition to the selection of picture books, novels to be read aloud to the students were also selected. The novels were opportunities for both whole class and small group dialogue. The following table shares the titles of the novels selected to be read aloud to the students during the study (see Table 2.2)

**Table 2.2 Novels selected to read whole group for the study.**

<b>Novels</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<i>Becoming Naomi León</i>	Pam Muñoz Ryan	This novel follows Naomi Leon, her brother, and grandmother. Naomi and her brother have lived with their grandmother for most of their life, until one day, Naomi's mother, Skyla, returns. Skyla wants to take Naomi to live with her and her new boyfriend, but Naomi doesn't want to. Skyla has problems with drinking alcohol and Naomi and her grandmother fear Naomi being taken away. They cross into Mexico searching for Naomi's biological father to help support Naomi in fighting a custody battle. In the novel, Naomi reunites with friends and family and her father. She finds the courage to become a lioness and fight for herself.
<i>The Wild Book</i>	Margarita Engle	This novel in verse, follows Fefa, a girl struggling to read because of dyslexia. Her mother supports her by giving her a blank book to fill the pages with words. As the novel progresses Fefa learns the value of reading and writing and uses her words to help her navigate through difficult situations.
<i>How Tía Lola Came To Visit (Stay)</i>	Julia Alvarez	In this novel, Tía Lola is coming to visit Miguel and his family in Vermont. Coming from the Dominican Republic, Tía Lola has yet to learn English. Miguel is worried that Tía Lola will make things worse for him but finds that Tía Lola's spontaneous and loving character brings a different response, making Miguel rethink

		about his feelings towards Tía Lola and his wishes change as he works towards making them come true for the better. In his journey he appreciates his culture and language and finds value in his family.
<i>Under the Mesquite</i>	Guadalupe Garcia McCall	This novel in verse, follows Lupita's journey as she shares her mother being diagnosed with cancer. Lupita shares her struggles in high school, being an older sibling, and eventually taking care of the family as her mom goes through chemotherapy. In the novel, Lupita loses her mother and discusses her loss as well as her continuation to go to college as she thinks about her passion: acting; something her mother loved about Lupita.
<i>La Linea</i>	Ann Jaramillo	This novel follows Miguel who wants to reunite with his mother and father by crossing the border from Mexico into the U.S. to reach California. In his journey he finds multiple dangers from jumping into a train, crossing an unbearable hot desert, and the dangers of approaching robbers. He crosses the border with the help of Javier and his sister, to reunite with his family and acquire a better life.

After the selection of the picture books and novels, a timeline was created for the study, in which the books were paired and sorted into specific weeks and groups, as the books would be rotated among five groups of four students in each group to explore. In the following section the process of creating a timeline is described along with how this timeline for the curriculum was approached as a teacher researcher.

### **Creating A Curriculum Timeline**

I was very mindful of time, as I approached this teacher research to collect the data from student discussions. At the same time, I wanted to do the most with the time I would set aside. Teachers are required to have time for every subject each day, plus teachers need to take into account last minute changes, plans, or unplanned events such as fire drills, bus evacuations,

testing windows, assemblies, end of the year parties and so forth. Thus, when creating a proposed curriculum timeline, I planned around these events and holidays.

My English Language Arts block occurred in the morning from 8:30 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. The study was planned to take place during that time, so students could explore books and be immersed in dialogue about those books while, at the same time, be engaged in ELA instruction. Planning for the research study and being expected to teach ELA as a classroom teacher, I planned to merge my ELA teaching practices with the student discussions for this research. Students wouldn't be analyzing the text to find the main idea or theme, but they would put into practice their own ways of reading and connecting with the text.

Therefore, the morning block was a perfect fit to meet the needs of lesson planning and the study. In addition, as an ILLP instructor and former English Language Development (ELD) teacher, the school district required me to teach a minimum of 2 to 4 hours of English instruction. As a result, my schedule block for ELA needed to have a set time of 2 to 4 hours of English instruction. Because students were reading and discussing the books in English, this met the requirement of speaking and listening skills and the requirement to read literature. Therefore, the timeline set for the study and the required instruction met those requirements.

Table 2.3 illustrates the way that this block of time was organized to meet the ELA and ELD teaching requirements as well as discussions within this study.

**Table 2.3 Weekly Schedule Block for ELA, ILLP, and Study**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
8:30-8:50 a.m.	Read Aloud of novel	Read Aloud of novel	Read Aloud of novel	Read Aloud of novel	Read Aloud of novel
8:50-10:00 a.m.	Small group discussions	Small group discussions	Small group Discussions	Small group discussions	Small group discussions
10:00-10:20 a.m.	<b>Student responses:</b>	<b>Student responses:</b>	<b>Student responses:</b>	<b>Student responses:</b>	<b>Student responses:</b>



	-Sketch to stretch -Graffiti board -Written response	-Sketch to stretch -Graffiti board -Written response	-Sketch to stretch -Graffiti board -Written response	-Sketch to stretch -Graffiti board -Written response	-Sketch to stretch -Graffiti board -Written response
10:20-10:30 a.m.	Whole group discussion	Whole group discussion	Whole group discussion	Whole group discussion	Whole group discussion
10:30-11:50 a.m.	Guided Reading And Writing Block with Grammar Instruction	Guided Reading And Writing Block with Grammar Instruction	Guided Reading And Writing Block with Grammar Instruction	Guided Reading And Writing Block with Grammar Instruction	Guided Reading And Writing Block with Grammar Instruction

With this schedule, I planned for discussions to begin the second week of January and to be completed by the fourth week of May. The classroom set up was designed so that there would be five tables to make five groups of four students in each group. It was imperative for me to be mindful of the number of groups and students to select the number of books needed for the study. Once I had the classroom set up and schedule, I began selecting and pairing books.

I had a number of criteria in selecting books. First, I sought books that reflected a Latinx perspective, were written by Latinx authors, or included topics that Latinx students in the classroom could personally talk about or expand on. I also looked for books that focused on the same issue or topic. If both books talked about immigration, for example, I paired them, even though the specific experiences of the characters were different. This pairing allowed me to select books that would give students multiple stories around a topic or issue, so as not to reflect just one perspective or story. Because there would be 5 groups and I wanted the groups to rotate their books, once I had a theme, I needed 10 books to pair around that theme. I initially did this because I wanted students to look at a topic or theme in a 5 week cycle (refer to Appendix A for the initial proposed schedule), but time and students' interests shifted my initial approach.

As I found books for the study, I sorted them into weeks and groups, so that the books could be rotated easily following a time frame. I wanted read alouds to become an important piece in this study and since ELA instruction requires read alouds, I selected novels that would in some way connect to the picture books selected for the weeks and rotations. From the rotations, I needed to plan how and who would read the books, so I created groups that not only had diverse learners and readers, but students who could help one another if they got stuck.

For the reading engagement, each table had two picturebooks that related to the topic or issue. I got two copies of each book so each table had four books (two pairs), since the students were seated in groups of 4. One pair held one copy of the book and the other pair had the other copy of the same book. The students read with their partners. One partner read aloud while the other followed. That way all four students read the book at the same time and at their own pace, after which they discussed the book. Then the students picked up the second book which also had two copies and continued to read and then discuss. However, I do want to note that the books didn't arrive all at once and sometimes I did not have enough funds to purchase multiple copies. When that was the case, one student read to the group of four while the others listened and then discussed.

Since I didn't have enough funds to purchase audio recorders for each group, I only bought two. This led me to select two focus groups based on the diversity within the group of students who had different views, stories, and experiences. For example, one group consisted of an English Language Learner, a native English speaker, a student who identified as Mexican but spoke no Spanish, and a student who was bilingual. The audio recorders needed to be passed around in order to capture the students' responses. The students knew how to pass around the

audio recorder, but it made the discussions a bit harder because of the consistent passing around and then talking. Another device may have provided a more natural conversation.

Table 2.4 shares the curriculum timeline that was followed for the study. In the appendix, I share the initial proposal of the timeline I sought to follow, but as mentioned above, time and the way the discussions developed shifted the original plan.

**Table 2.4 Timeline for the books to be read and grouped by weeks.**

Weeks	Novels & Picture Books to Be Explored
<b>Week 1: January 7-11, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>Becoming Naomi León</i> by Pam Muñoz Ryan</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Dreamers</i> by Yuyi Morales, <i>The Journey</i> by Francesca Sanna, <i>Migrant</i> by Maxine Trottier</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Mamá The Alien</i> by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and <i>Dear Primo</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Two White Rabbits</i> by Jairo Buitrago and <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match</i> by Monica Brown and <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> by Juana Martinez-Neal</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Drawn Together</i> by Minh Lé and <i>I Love Saturdays y Domingos</i> by Alma Flor Ada, and <i>A Different Pond</i> by Bao Phi</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2: January 14-18, 2019</b>	<p><b>Novel:</b> <i>Becoming Naomi León</i> by Pam Muñoz Ryan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Dreamers</i> by Yuyi Morales, <i>The Journey</i> by Francesca Sanna, <i>Migrant</i> by Maxine Trottier</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Mamá The Alien</i> by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and <i>Dear Primo</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Two White Rabbits</i> by Jairo Buitrago and <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match</i> by Monica Brown and <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> by Juana Martinez-Neal</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Drawn Together</i> by Minh Lé and <i>I Love Saturdays y Domingos</i> by Alma Flor Ada, and <i>A Different Pond</i> by Bao Phi</li> </ul>
<b>Week 3: January 21-25, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>Becoming Naomi León</i> by Pam Muñoz Ryan</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Dreamers</i> by Yuyi Morales, <i>The Journey</i> by Francesca Sanna, <i>Migrant</i> by Maxine Trottier</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Mamá The Alien</i> by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and <i>Dear Primo</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Two White Rabbits</i> by Jairo Buitrago and <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match</i> by Monica Brown and <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> by Juana Martinez-Neal</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Drawn Together</i> by Minh Lé and <i>I Love Saturdays y Domingos</i> by Alma Flor Ada, and <i>A Different Pond</i> by Bao Phi</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4: January 28-February 1, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>Becoming Naomi León</i> by Pam Muñoz Ryan</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Dreamers</i> by Yuyi Morales, <i>The Journey</i> by Francesca Sanna, <i>Migrant</i> by Maxine Trottier</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Mamá The Alien</i> by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and <i>Dear Primo</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Two White Rabbits</i> by Jairo Buitrago and <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match</i> by Monica Brown and <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> by Juana Martinez-Neal</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Drawn Together</i> by Minh Lé and <i>I Love Saturdays y Domingos</i> by Alma Flor Ada, and <i>A Different Pond</i> by Bao Phi</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5: February 4-8, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel in Verse:</b> <i>The Wild Book</i> by Margarita Engle</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Dreamers</i> by Yuyi Morales, <i>The Journey</i> by Francesca Sanna, <i>Migrant</i> by Maxine Trottier</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Mamá The Alien</i> by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and <i>Dear Primo</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Two White Rabbits</i> by Jairo Buitrago and <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match</i> by Monica Brown and <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> by Juana Martinez-Neal</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Drawn Together</i> by Minh Lé and <i>I Love Saturdays y Domingos</i> by Alma Flor Ada, and <i>A Different Pond</i> by Bao Phi</li> </ul>
<b>Week 6: February 11-15, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel in Verse:</b> <i>The Wild Book</i> by Margarita Engle</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and <i>The Upside Down Boy</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Calling The Doves</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>My Diary From Here to There</i> by Amada Irma Perez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Me and My Fear</i> by Francesca Sanna and <i>The Day War Came</i> by Nicola Davies</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Somos Como Las Nubes</i> by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and <i>I'm New Here</i> by Anne Sibley O'Brien</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>I Pledge Allegiance</i> by Pat Mora and <i>Carmela Full of Wishes</i> by Matt de La Peña</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7: February 18-22, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel in Verse:</b> <i>The Wild Book</i> by Margarita Engle</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and <i>The Upside Down Boy</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Calling The Doves</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>My Diary From Here to There</i> by Amada Irma Perez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Me and My Fear</i> by Francesca Sanna and <i>The Day War Came</i> by Nicola Davies</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Somos Como Las Nubes</i> by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and <i>I'm New Here</i> by Anne Sibley O'Brien</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>I Pledge Allegiance</i> by Pat Mora and <i>Carmela Full of Wishes</i> by Matt de La Peña</li> </ul>
<b>Week 8: February 25-March 1, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>How Tía Lola Came To Visit</i> by Julia Alvarez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and <i>The Upside Down Boy</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Calling The Doves</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>My Diary From Here to There</i> by Amada Irma Perez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Me and My Fear</i> by Francesca Sanna and <i>The Day War Came</i> by Nicola Davies</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Somos Como Las Nubes</i> by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and <i>I'm New Here</i> by Anne Sibley O'Brien</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>I Pledge Allegiance</i> by Pat Mora and <i>Carmela Full of Wishes</i> by Matt de La Peña</li> </ul>
<b>Week 9: March 4-8, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>How Tía Lola Came To Visit</i> by Julia Alvarez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and <i>The Upside Down Boy</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Calling The Doves</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>My Diary From Here to There</i> by Amada Irma Perez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Me and My Fear</i> by Francesca Sanna and <i>The Day War Came</i> by Nicola Davies</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>Somos Como Las Nubes</i> by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and <i>I'm New Here</i> by Anne Sibley O'Brien</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>I Pledge Allegiance</i> by Pat Mora and <i>Carmela Full of Wishes</i> by Matt de La Peña</li> </ul>
<b>Week 10: March 11-15, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>How Tía Lola Came To Visit</i> by Julia Alvarez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1 Books:</b> <i>Pepita Talks Twice</i> by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and <i>The Upside Down Boy</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2 Books:</b> <i>Calling The Doves</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>My Diary From Here to There</i> by Amada Irma Perez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3 Books:</b> <i>Me and My Fear</i> by Francesca Sanna and <i>The Day War Came</i> by Nicola Davies</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4 Books:</b> <i>Somos Como Las Nubes</i> by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and <i>I'm New Here</i> by Anne Sibley O'Brien</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5 Books:</b> <i>I Pledge Allegiance</i> by Pat Mora and <i>Carmela Full of Wishes</i> by Matt de La Peña</li> </ul>
<b>Week 11: March 25-29, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>How Tía Lola Came To Visit</i> by Julia Alvarez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1:</b> <i>Separate is Never Equal</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez</i> by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2:</b> <i>Listening with My Heart</i> by Gabi Garcia and <i>Thank You Omu</i> by Oge Mora</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3:</b> <i>Imagine</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>The Streets are Free</i> by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4:</b> <i>Drum Dream Girl</i> by Margarita Engle and <i>Emmanuel's Dream</i> by Laurie Ann Thompson</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5:</b> <i>Islandborn</i> by Junot Diaz and <i>Going Home</i> by Eve Bunting</li> </ul>
<b>Week 12: April 1-5, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>How Tía Lola Came To Visit</i> by Julia Alvarez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5:</b> <i>Separate is Never Equal</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez</i> by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1:</b> <i>Listening with My Heart</i> by Gabi Garcia and <i>Thank You Omu</i> by Oge Mora</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2:</b> <i>Imagine</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>The Streets are Free</i> by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3:</b> <i>Drum Dream Girl</i> by Margarita Engle and <i>Emmanuel's Dream</i> by Laurie Ann Thompson</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4:</b> <i>Islandborn</i> by Junot Diaz and <i>Going Home</i> by Eve Bunting</li> </ul>
<b>Week 13: April 8-12, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>How Tía Lola Came To Visit</i> by Julia Alvarez</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Group 4:</b> <i>Separate is Never Equal</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez</i> by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5:</b> <i>Listening with My Heart</i> by Gabi Garcia and <i>Thank You Omu</i> by Oge Mora</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1:</b> <i>Imagine</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>The Streets are Free</i> by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2:</b> <i>Drum Dream Girl</i> by Margarita Engle and <i>Emmanuel's Dream</i> by Laurie Ann Thompson</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3:</b> <i>Islandborn</i> by Junot Diaz and <i>Going Home</i> by Eve Bunting</li> </ul>
<b>Week 14: April 15-19, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>How Tía Lola Came To Visit</i> by Julia Alvarez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3:</b> <i>Separate is Never Equal</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez</i> by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4:</b> <i>Listening with My Heart</i> by Gabi Garcia and <i>Thank You Omu</i> by Oge Mora</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5:</b> <i>Imagine</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>The Streets are Free</i> by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1:</b> <i>Drum Dream Girl</i> by Margarita Engle and <i>Emmanuel's Dream</i> by Laurie Ann Thompson</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2:</b> <i>Islandborn</i> by Junot Diaz and <i>Going Home</i> by Eve Bunting</li> </ul>
<b>Week 15: April 22-26, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Group 2:</b> <i>Separate is Never Equal</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez</i> by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3:</b> <i>Listening with My Heart</i> by Gabi Garcia and <i>Thank You Omu</i> by Oge Mora</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4:</b> <i>Imagine</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>The Streets are Free</i> by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert</li> <li>○ <b>Group 5:</b> <i>Drum Dream Girl</i> by Margarita Engle and <i>Emmanuel's Dream</i> by Laurie Ann Thompson</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1:</b> <i>Islandborn</i> by Junot Diaz and <i>Going Home</i> by Eve Bunting</li> </ul>
<b>Week 16: April 29-May 3, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>La Linea</i> by Ann Jaramillo</li> <li>○ <b>Picture books:</b> <i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de La Peña and <i>A Gift from Abuela</i> by Cecilia Ruiz</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Group 1:</b> <i>Waiting for Papá</i> by René Colato Laínez and <i>Friends from the Other Side</i> by Gloria Anzaldua</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2:</b> <i>Super Cilantro Girl</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>America is Her Name</i> by Luis J. Rodriguez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3:</b> <i>Undocumented: A Worker's Fight</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>From North to South</i> by René Laínez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4:</b> <i>The Dress and the Girl</i> by Camille Andros and <i>Amelia's Road</i> by Linda Jacobs Altman and <i>First Day in Grapes</i> by L King Perez</li> </ul>
<b>Week 17: May 6-10, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>La Linea</i> by Ann Jaramillo</li> <li>○ <b>Picture books:</b> <i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de La Peña and <i>A Gift from Abuela</i> by Cecilia Ruiz</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1:</b> <i>The Dress and the Girl</i> by Camille Andros and <i>Amelia's Road</i> by Linda Jacobs Altman and <i>First Day in Grapes</i> by L King Perez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2:</b> <i>Waiting for Papá</i> by René Colato Laínez and <i>Friends from the Other Side</i> by Gloria Anzaldua</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3:</b> <i>Super Cilantro Girl</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>America is Her Name</i> by Luis J. Rodriguez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4:</b> <i>Undocumented: A Worker's Fight</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>From North to South</i> by René Laínez</li> </ul>
<b>Week 18: May 13-17, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>La Linea</i> by Ann Jaramillo</li> <li>○ <b>Picture books:</b> <i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de La Peña and <i>A Gift from Abuela</i> by Cecilia Ruiz</li> <li>○ <b>Group 1:</b> <i>Undocumented: A Worker's Fight</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>From North to South</i> by René Laínez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 2:</b> <i>The Dress and the Girl</i> by Camille Andros and <i>Amelia's Road</i> by Linda Jacobs Altman and <i>First Day in Grapes</i> by L King Perez</li> <li>○ <b>Group 3:</b> <i>Waiting for Papá</i> by René Colato Laínez and <i>Friends from the Other Side</i> by Gloria Anzaldua</li> <li>○ <b>Group 4:</b> <i>Super Cilantro Girl</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera and <i>America is Her Name</i> by Luis J. Rodriguez</li> </ul>
<b>Week 19: May 20-24, 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Novel:</b> <i>La Linea</i> by Ann Jaramillo</li> <li>○ <b>Picture books:</b> <i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de La Peña</li> <li>○ <b>Whole Group Read Aloud:</b> <i>Waiting for Papá</i> by René Colato Laínez and <i>Friends from the Other Side</i> by Gloria Anzaldua</li> </ul>



Having a curriculum timeline made approaching the teacher research on literature discussions efficient. The books had already been paired and sorted into specific time frames as well as which books would go to which books and for what week that would occur in. As the study unfolded, however, it is important to note that not all the books were explored and the timeline was adjusted to the AZmerit state testing and preparation, and constant observations from the principal and other staff.

From January 2019 to May 2019, in a school located in the south side of Tucson, Arizona, students in the fourth and fifth grade classroom were invited to engage and discuss around a text set of books that reflected Latinx experiences. Being the teacher of the students for the past two years gave me an opportunity to get to know the students better and learn from them at a deeper level. My relationship with the students allowed for both the students and I to collaborate with each other through the books selected which encouraged us to reflect on ourselves, the community, and so much more. At the school, most of the student population consists of Latinx students, mostly students coming from Mexico or of Mexican descent, as am I. So, creating a space that built from student relationships prior to the study and building new relationships with new students, gave me the opportunity to create experiences for the students to delve into deep and critical conversations and reflections.

Hence the literature invited and engaged students to collaborate with me and each other to have in-depth discussions around books that covered a wide range of topics and themes. The themes and topics were not given to the students to discuss, instead the discussion around the books led students to talk about different themes and topics they found interesting or connected to as they reflected on their own personal experiences. Since students were able to bring in their

own experiences and knowledge, much of that was also found in the student work, reflections, and dialogue as they shared their stories.

Students were not asked to analyze books in a traditional teacher-led manner. For example, I did not ask the students to look for character traits or plot summaries. Instead, students used literature discussion strategies to collaborate with each other and discuss what was meaningful to them. This could have been connections between their lives and the text or looking for a summary to pose questions on ideas or topics they found intriguing. The students had opportunities to write, draw, discuss, and share their ideas, stories, reflections, feelings, and experiences with each other. As both the teacher and the researcher, I facilitated discussions rather than led them in small groups and found that I was invited by the students to share my ideas with them as I too became a participant.

There were no direct directions to students to look for certain things in the process of reading and discussing the books because I wanted the issues to evolve from their group discussion. Instead students sought and spoke about what they found from the books based on their own agendas and experiences. With that freedom, I learned more and more about how these books impacted and engaged students into the conversations that they were having, and also discovered what was meaningful to them to discuss.

One method of data collection was audio recordings collected from small group discussions. There were two focus groups because there were only two audio recorders. I selected two groups seated in the front of the classroom, so that it was easier for me to move around and be close to the groups. The groups also reflected diverse students. As mentioned previously, one group, for example, had a bilingual, native English speaker, an English Language Learner, and a girl who identified as Mexican and spoke only English. The other group consisted

of two white peers who spoke only English, a refugee (only for a short time), and two bilingual speakers. I selected these two groups because the students in each group had a range of opinions, ideas, and experiences to share.

Students knew how to use the audio recorders. They held the audio recorders near their mouths so that the recorder could pick up their discussions, since leaving them in the middle did not pick up much audio. As a result, students had to take turns with the audio recorder in order for the recorder to record their voices. A limitation in this process was that the students had to pause frequently to pass the recorder, therefore the discussion wasn't as natural as it could have been if the recorder was in the middle of the table.

In addition to the recorders, data was collected through graffiti boards. This meant that as students read the picture books in their groups, they participated in writing or drawing in a section of a chart paper, divided into four sections for each group member within the group. The purpose of the graffiti board is for students to immediately draw or write their reflections in their section of the chart paper and then discuss their reflections with each other. Graffiti boards are tools for students to use to dialogue with each other and to reflect on the books read and so provided a means for me to examine in process student thinking.

Another method used to collect data were student written reflections. Students would read a pair of books in their groups and then instead of discussing the book right away, they would have a designated time to write their thoughts, feelings, connections, and/or reflections of the text on a piece of lined paper. They then shared their writing with their group members. I collected the written artifacts and recorded their discussions of these artifacts.

Sketch to stretch was another method for collecting student data. Instead of students writing immediately after reading their pair of books in their groups or reading a selection of the

books read as a class, students drew on a piece of blank paper their reflections, connections, feelings, and/or thoughts. Then, students discussed their drawings with each other and shared their reflections. Again, I collected both their drawings and recorded their discussions of these artifacts.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

In this section, the methods for the data collection process are described. As a teacher researcher in the classroom, dialogue was captured in multiple ways as we interacted with the books as noted in the previous section.

Finally, as a teacher, I used a teacher research journal where I marked quick notes based on my observations of the students and the dialogue occurring in each group. I also wrote detailed weekly memos, reflecting both as a teacher during the study as well as a researcher. In the memos not only did I begin to analyze the data, but the memos also served as a reflection on my experiences as a teacher. These memos were submitted weekly to my dissertation chair.

I would like to note that everything was collected the same day that it was created. For instance, when students worked on graffiti boards, sketch to stretch activities and written responses, the data was collected immediately and stored in the classroom for me to analyze at a later time, which was sometimes right away after school, but mostly during the summer months, when I could focus on analyzing the data. The teacher reflection journals were completed and collected the same day that I observed students, and the memos were written and collected weekly, with some notes coming from my daily observations jotted down in my teacher journal.

### **Teacher Reflection Weekly Memos**

The teacher reflection weekly memos were weekly reflections that I as a teacher kept throughout the course of the study. The reflections served as opportunities for me to reflect and

record my own teaching practices, observations of students, and my experiences as a teacher throughout the process of incorporating literature discussions in the classroom. The weekly memos were a powerful tool as I was able to really think deeply about the students' interactions with the books and about my own implementation of literature discussions in the classroom.

In the memos I reflected on time constraints to the actual events that occurred in the study and things occurring outside the study. I recorded student thoughts and ideas and how the students and I talked about the issues explored in the books at other times of the day. For instance, there was a moment in my weekly memos where I reflected and spoke about the children going to a field trip and how the students talked about the American dream of having a big house and good job. This issue was one that the books touched upon as students talked about immigration and why many choose to cross the border from Mexico into the United States.

The weekly memos were also a place where I could break down step by step how I approached the literature discussions or how outside factors limited literature discussions due to testing schedules, fire drills, and so forth. In the memos, I was also able to express my tensions and pose further questions about the study itself and student discussions or reflections. The memos served as a snapshot of what really did happen each week during the study as well as my thinking during that course of time.

As a teacher and researcher this was very important as I went back to analyze the data because I could pull out a weekly memo and think about the reality of what was happening as students focused on a set of books. The memos also hold the actual times and dates of which books were read and what date they were explored which served as a timeline and record of how the time was used. This allows me to see what days and what events were happening as the students engaged with literature discussions. As a teacher, the weekly memos allowed me time to

reflect on my own teaching practices and approaches to the students as a first step of analysis. It gave me the opportunity to get to know and reflect on students' discussions in the classroom and what they found valuable and meaningful. Finally, as a teacher, the memos serve as a time capsule for the memories and discussions occurring at that time.

Along with analyzing and sorting through the written reflections, graffiti boards, and sketch to stretch artifacts collected from the students, my teacher reflection weekly memos served as a compliment to the student data. My teacher voice and reflection of the discussions taking place allowed for a quick analysis and response to what was being observed at that time. Not only did I use post it notes to analyze and sort through the student artifacts, but I also used the post it notes to find examples and responses related to the themes. The weekly teacher reflection memos served as extensions of the student data as the themes also revealed themselves through my writing as a teacher. Thus, going back to my weekly reflection memos became an important aspect in analyzing and sorting through my notes to find many more examples that tied to the themes that the students were finding valuable to discuss and reflect upon. Shagoury and Power (2012) state that teacher researchers taking notes is a valuable process and step into understanding and interpreting the data:

*By observing your classroom closely, slowly compiling information about students and your curriculum over time, you build confidence in your research ability...From the "whole cloth" of everything that occurs in your classroom, you will eventually be piecing together the patterns that form your research findings—the story you will tell. (p. 120)*

In other words, the teacher reflection weekly memos served as a great piece of information to compile and gather a broad perspective of what students shared in their literature discussion groups. As a result, the weekly teacher reflection memos served as a puzzle piece in identifying more about the themes and subthemes that students engaged with.

### **Teacher Reflection Journal Notes**

The teacher reflection journal notes were recorded weekly and sometimes daily. The notes were taken and kept in a teacher reflection journal. The journal was used mostly as I sat around with different groups and jotted down what I was hearing from the students at that time and place. The journal was a way for me to record my thinking and the thinking of the students in a very quick way. It served as an informal way for me to record student thinking and discussions and my own interpretations of that thinking. The notes were short and specific to something that stood out to me from the students' discussions at the time.

I jotted down things that served as "aha" moments for myself as a teacher. This could be students discussing their own points of view, jotting down student disagreements, or recording student thinking about a topic, book, or issue that I had never thought about before. The teacher reflection journal notes served a very important role in my process of analyzing the data because I could go back to my teacher reflection journal and refer to what my own thinking was as well as what I found important to a certain discussion. As both a teacher and a researcher this was helpful because it allowed me the opportunity to see what I was thinking and what I was mostly paying attention to.

According to Shagoury and Power (2012) these notes are: "In the midst notes." They state " 'In the midst' notes are the observations you make while your students are at work. You might write 'in the midst' while walking through the room, with your notepad in hand, jotting down what you see" (p. 121). My notebook served as a quick opportunity to jot down my thinking and students' thinking of the discussions or topics. The purpose of these notes were for me to have quick access to a journal to record my observations of the students and their ideas and responses to the books.

When going back to the data and student's responses, it was important for me to look at my journal to see my notes of the date and time the discussions took place in and see if there was a relationship between what I wrote down in my notebook to what I was seeing and analyzing in the student work. Therefore, through my analysis and sorting of the data, it was important to also sort my notes as a teacher and see if there were things I touched upon that the students also engaged with.

### **Audio Recordings**

The audio recordings played a vital role in the process of collecting and analyzing the data. The recording of students' talk was a beneficial tool in capturing their discussions and use of graffiti boards. The audio recorder provided students the opportunity to slow down in their talking and take time to listen to one another. The audio recorder also helped students share their voices with each other and discuss together. There were many instances where students were recorded asking their peers to discuss or to add to the discussion. The audio recorder helped students take turn in discussing and permitting everyone an equal opportunity to share, if the child wanted to. As mentioned in the previous sections, I want to continue to note that the audio recorders for this study may have had limitations as students had to pause in their talk and thinking to pass the recorder around so not as much discussion may have been collected because of this and there were student who may have not wanted to be recorded and their voices may be absent. However, Shagoury and Power (2012) state:

*An Audio recorder can be an invaluable tool for the classroom researcher. It allows you to fit your research project into the nooks and crannies of time outside the school day. You can play back one-on-one conferences, classroom discussions, and small-group work sessions, and listen intently and repeatedly if necessary. (p. 107)*



For me as a teacher and researcher this opportunity was valuable because I was able to capture students' thoughts and discussions digitally. This allowed me to have students record themselves during the day. In the evening, I would go back and listen to the audio and transcribe it. Thus, the discussions were organized and written down for future reference. Plus, the audio recorder also helped me as a teacher keep track of which books were currently discussing and which books, they would discuss next as well as when the discussions took place.

Going back to the audio recordings to code and analyze and listen to what students were saying, I noted that the themes were also revealing themselves there as many students had conversations about immigration and family separation. Shagoury and Power (2012) state: "but much of the value of audio and video recordings is that they allow you to revisit your classroom, and your research issues, long after the actual event" (p. 107). As I revisited the data for analysis, I intently listened to students' discussions to find what issues or topics students were discussing the most. As the themes evolved through my analysis and categorization of all data, it was through audio recording that I could connect discussions to the physical artifacts collected from the students. In chapter 3, when the themes are discussed closely, the artifacts and data collected from students show the intertwining discussions of the themes as they relate and speak to each other through a Latinx lens.

Chapter 3 shares the themes found and the examples for each theme. The themes all intertwine as many themes have connections or relationships to one another and just like the themes intertwine the data also intertwines as each piece of data can speak for more than one theme. The data becomes the students' voices of the topics and issues students found valid and valuable to discuss and is not linear, but instead takes various forms and points of view to discuss about multiple aspects around Latinx issues.

The methods used in the classroom coordinated with each other. Each discussion strategy and approach to collecting the data from the students and from my perspective as a teacher-researcher allowed the research to evolve and take form so many lens and voices could be captured at the time. Each artifact, reflection, or discussion analyzed is a reminder of the unique and diverse strategies humans have when they discuss, reflect, and share their stories with each other. Of the methods explored with the students, those methods used to collect and analyze the data served as a crucial component to the puzzle, as the pieces were being put together.

All the strategies worked well and allowed a pathway into multiple perspectives and ways of sharing those perspectives, interpretations, reflections, and transactions to take form. Sorting through the data served as a scavenger hunt to discovering the voices and thoughts of students about what really matters to them. The data serves as a reminder of the capabilities that students have when given the opportunity to share with each other their stories, thinking, and reflections.

### **Data Analysis Process**

In this section, my process and approach to analyzing and coding the data are described. It is important to note that the data was not analyzed with the students because of the short amount of time we had due to testing to prepare students for their fifth-grade promotion. Instead the data was analyzed and coded after the end of the school year. The data was gathered over the course of four different time frames.

The analysis of the data led to emerging themes from student voices and I was able to find patterns and multiple appearances of certain topics or themes which became the themes I explore to answer my research questions. The following data contributed to my process of finding the themes and subthemes: audio recordings, teacher reflection journal notes, transcripts

of audio recordings, literature discussion graffiti boards, sketch to stretch artifacts, and student written reflections.

The process of categorizing and analyzing took about four weeks to accomplish. The data was first categorized and analyzed to identify children's thoughts and feelings. This was noted and color coded on purple sticky notes. I sorted through the sketch to stretch artifacts, written responses, graffiti boards, and student dialogue and solely noted the feelings that students shared. In the purple sticky notes I noted if the students felt sad, happy, angry, scared, or gave any emotional response. That process then took me to find themes or topics that students directly talked about, drew, or mentioned.

Analyzing the student data with post-it notes was also a crucial component in my understanding of students' voices. The post it notes allowed me to revisit the data a total of four times, with each re-reading allowing me to see something new. The post it notes served as a good visual of what I was seeing from student data. As I collected the post it notes after observing my own notes and student artifacts, I was able to place the post it notes together to create groups, which later became themes, which enabled me to see what students' found most interesting to discuss about or what they were really thinking at that time.

In addition, because the post it notes were color coded, I was able to sort through the data easily to separate the topics students discussed from the issues they raised. I was also able to separate student emotions in one color coded post-it note from student thinking recorded on another colored post-it note. Not only did colored post-it notes help me separate and differentiate from certain ways of analyzing the data, but as I saw the themes evolve, I used colored post it notes to jot down the themes on different colors, which allowed me to find a total of seven themes. For example, the theme of fear got a purple sticky note where another theme got a

different color. As I looked through the data and found five pieces talking about fear, I took out five different purple stick notes and wrote fear on them. When I looked at the set of post it notes, this allowed me to see which theme was the most discussed about: borders, family, and childism. Thus, the post it notes served as a bird's eye view of the data and what was most meaningful to students. The data not only shared the themes students discussed, but which themes were discussed the most.

For the second analysis of the data, an orange sticky note was used. In the orange sticky note, I recorded the topics or themes that led to the emotional responses. For instance, if students wrote that they felt sad, I sought to find what it was that made them respond that way. Was it the subject? Topic? Was it an issue that the book explored? What were students writing about most in their reflections that triggered the emotional responses? Overall, what came up the most in student discussions? What topics, subjects, or issues were touched upon? These were questions that guided my analysis as I sorted through the data a second time, seeking those topics, subjects, and topics students responded to the most.

It was imperative for me as the teacher researcher in this second analysis to go back to my research questions and use those questions to frame what I was going to look at closely when I examined the data a third time. In the beginning of this study, the questions I sought to explore were the following:

1. What social issues do students discuss in literature groups?
2. How do literary response strategies influence student dialogue?
3. How does the theoretical frame influence my decision making as a teacher?

Going into the data for a third time, the question that seemed the most relevant was the first question: what social issues do students discuss in literature groups? The more and more I read,

the more I found out about what students were talking about related to specific social issues. So, when looking at the set of data for a third time, the data was analyzed with that question in mind. As I sorted through the data, I classified the specific issues students were discussing, such as sorting through the data such as immigration from social issues around family separation. Again, I re-read the data and used another post it note this time colored pink, to jot down the social issues students were talking about. Again, the students had to directly mention, draw, reflect or illustrate some aspect of that social issue. The data was sorted with a general word or short phrase of the social issue. For example, if a student talked about immigration, the social issue of immigration was jotted down more generally.

To add to the analysis for the fourth time I revisited the data, a light blue post it note was used to add any further ideas or teacher transactions or interpretations from the students' work to expand or question what the student was talking about. For example, going back to the social issue of immigration, I would read students' reflections and see what aspect of immigration they mentioned. Were they talking about the border? Immigration as a factor in separating families? Were they sharing any fears on immigration? It was important for me to not just note the broader category of immigration, but its subcategory, which was done through the light blue post it note to jot down my thoughts and interpretations. I mostly jotted down questions or further thinking about the student's discussion, writing and drawings as well as my interpretation of the student reflection. See Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2 for some examples of my coding.

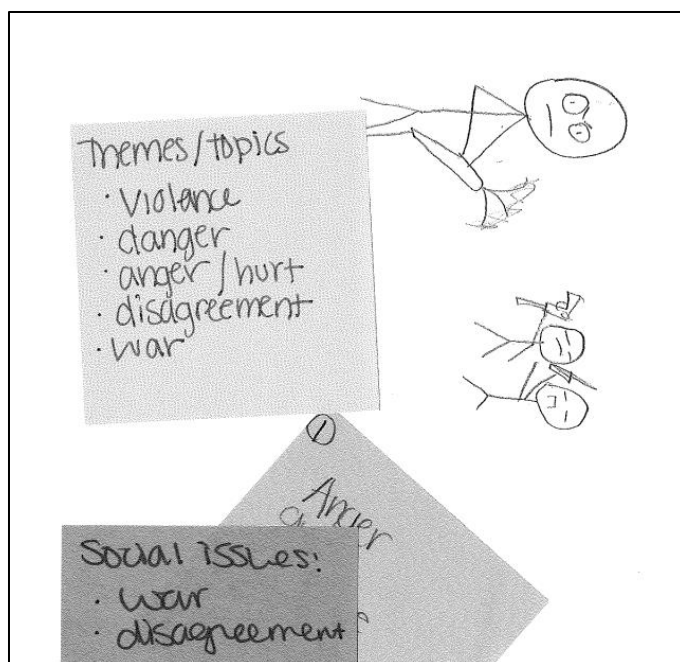


Figure 2.1. Coding example of various colored post it notes to list themes

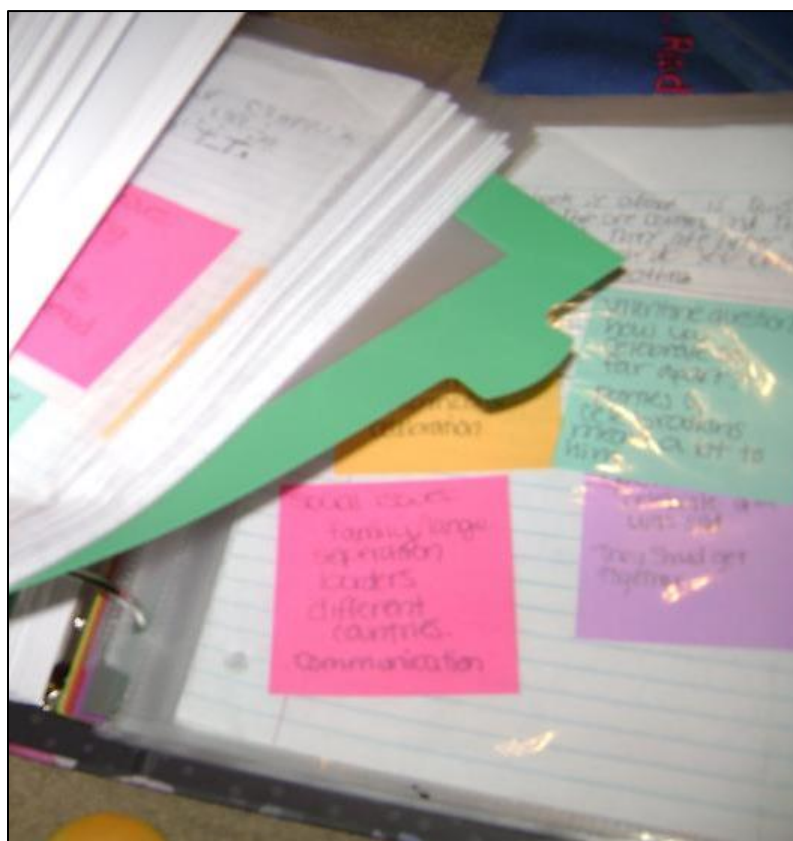


Figure 2.2. Coding of data using post-its for themes and subthemes







In Chapter 3 the themes along with the subthemes are explored closely along with student examples. In addition, Chapter 3 explores these broader themes in more condensed themes with condensed subthemes along with the criteria for each.



Figure 2.5. Organizing the seven themes and subthemes



Figure 2.6. Finding the seven themes

The process of classifying and analyzing the data happened as the data was revisited four different times. Each reflection, drawing, written response, graffiti board, and journal entry and memo was revisited to identify the themes and subthemes that students addressed during the study. The students did not code or analyze the data with me. It would have been interesting to have had them participate in this process, in that sense, lacking their perspective may be a limitation to the study.

In Chapter 3, each of the themes and subthemes are explored closely. The data is analyzed and interpreted with the voices of the students and their reflections in mind. The voices of the students and their experiences resonate and become heard, student work, examples, and dialogues are described. The data speaks to the students and their stories. It was through sorting the data that the students' voices were connected to the issues that spoke to them.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, my process for sorting through the data for analysis was discussed. The data that was sorted were student written reflections, sketch to stretch artifacts, and graffiti boards. In addition, the weekly memos and my teacher reflection journal were also sorted to find the themes that students discussed the most as I used post it notes to categorize the seven themes. Finally, the use of audio recorders was discussed and how audio recorders became an important aspect with collecting data and revisiting the data in my analysis process. The focus of this chapter also looked at my process for conducting my study and research as I brought in my experiences as a Latina student and teacher researcher. The community and the school, classroom, and neighborhood contexts were described as I took these components into consideration for approaching this teacher research study.

As a Latina teacher researcher, establishing opportunities for Latinx students to share and discuss books that connect to who they are was important. Keeping in mind the students, the community, and my experiences as a Latina was crucial to creating and conducting this research. It was through these experiences that I was able to move towards a study that would invite the voices of students to shed some light onto the Latinx experience. From collecting the books to gathering the data, this research is a reminder that teacher researcher is not just beneficial to the students and the educator community, but to theory and practice and how theory can inform practice as much as how practice can inform theory.

### CHAPTER 3: Student Themes and Social Issues Through a Latinx Lens

*“Write what should not be forgotten”*

*-Isabel Allende*

In chapter 2, the research design, data collection and analysis processes completed for this research were explored. The chapter described my process for sorting through the data, including student written responses, audio recordings, sketch to stretch artifacts, graffiti boards, weekly memos, and journal entries, to examine themes and social issues from student reflections to develop themes. Sorting through the data four times, the categories began to stand out on their own. Seven broad themes were found that resonated among the data from students: *Family, Borders, Dreams and Hopes, Racism, Identity, Childism, and Fear*.

Chapter 3 explores these themes with subthemes that closely reflect on the students' experiences and voices shared through their engagement with the literature discussion strategies and in their written reflections. In addition, subthemes for each of the themes are explored. Similarly, student examples are shared for each theme and subthemes, from transcripts of audio recordings, sketch to stretch artifacts, student writing, graffiti board samples, and my teacher reflection journal notes with excerpts from the weekly memos I wrote to reflect on the process or experiences the students and I had in the classroom.

It is important to note here, that the themes and subthemes which are explored closely in this chapter are intertwined. There are connections across the themes and subthemes coming from the student data and its analysis. The subthemes and themes meet in the middle as many of the issues Latinx students discussed in the classroom had a common ground. The subthemes and themes intertwine creating pathways for students to make connections among the themes and

their own experiences. Although, the themes may be separated into various sections to closely look at one issue in particular in this chapter, the reader may find that certain themes and its subthemes can inform other themes and subthemes as well.

A second section following the exploration of the themes explores the relationship between student dialogue and the literature discussion strategies used. For instance, the section explores how the literature discussion strategies such as graffiti boards, sketch to stretch, written responses, recording student dialogue, and so forth were used and whether these strategies had an influence on the student discussions and reflections.

Before delving into the themes that arose from the students' data, I want to make a note of the development of students' dialogue over time. The data indicates that the ways in which students responded to each other and to the texts shifted over time. For example, students in January responded by talking about the book and the characters and explaining what was happening in the book, whereas in February students began to open up and share their feelings. Then, in April and towards the end of the year, students began to dialogue by sharing more stories, reflecting on their lives, and questioning the world around them. This change in dialogue shifted because the environment the students were in transformed into a space where students felt encouraged to share with each other and they had more experiences with these discussion groups. As a result, stronger relationships were built and there was more confidence and trust with each other. Students became more open as the study progressed.

### **The Causes and Consequences of Family Separation**

In chapter 2, I shared that part of my process to approaching teacher action research in the classroom was through my perspective of being a Latina. Therefore, it is important that in my

approach to the data with its themes and subthemes, that I do so, not just from the perspective of a teacher, but through the lens of my own ethnic identity as a Latina.

Within our culture as Latinx communities, we place family first. For the students in the classroom and myself, family plays a vital part in our lives. We live with our families and stay close to them for most of our lives. Families make up a part of who we are as a lot of our knowledge and skills come from learning through and with our family members. Martha Floyd Tenery (2005) states:

*Children are exposed to relations with members of various age groups and learn to relate at a variety of levels with the adults and others in their lives. They may live with their parents, grandparents, stepparents, uncles and aunts, and may relate to them as family, friends, confidants, or acquaintances. (p. 125)*

This experience is not limited solely to Latinx families, but many families. Family members bring value to the essence and knowledge of the family dynamic. So, when engaged in reading through a set of books, the students always came back to the idea and meaning of family. Family is the true essence of belonging, identity, cultural practices, language, traditions and so forth. Martha Floyd Tenery (2005) further extends on this where she declares:

*At the household level, cultural practice is manifested in linguistic, literacy, religious, and cultural traditions or events. Such events provide families with a sense of belonging, solidarity and ethnic identity. For example, family rituals such as birthdays, quinceañeras, outings, and visitas de respeto provide a sense of belonging to the family and reaffirm family solidarity by bringing relatives together frequently. (p. 126)*

As the students read through the multiple books (see Table 2.1), they always pinpointed their sharing back to family. In the same way, the books also reflected the essence of family through Latinx and other family experiences.

Narrowing down within the bigger theme of family, students seemed to discuss family separation the most. It wasn't just the separation aspect, but the factors that play into separating families and the effects of that separation. Students reflected mainly on the consequences of

separating families. Students shared their fears and anger when families are separated from each other. Hence, students both of a Latinx background and those of a Caucasian background were opposed to family separation. Students noted multiple ways in which families were separated, which is described in greater detail below as subthemes. It is important to note that the following web was created for the theme: the consequence of family separation along with its subthemes which illustrate different ways in which families may be separated (see Figure 3.1)

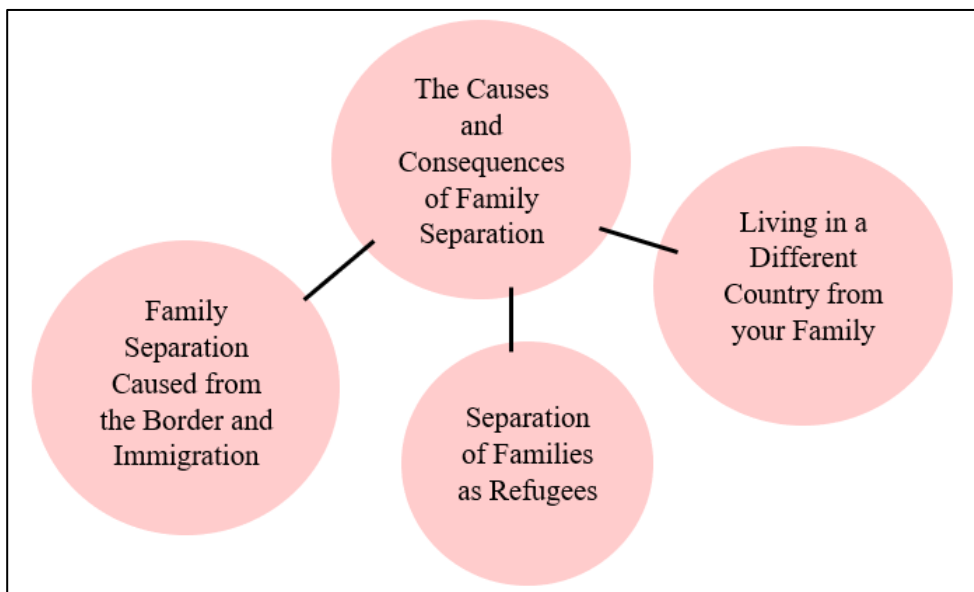


Figure 3.1. Web of the theme on family separation and its subthemes

### **Family Separation Caused from the Border and Immigration**

In the books, the characters had a family. Students found that concept very important to talk about as this was something they could relate to. They also have families, and, for some, their families are going through the same situation as the characters in the books. Of the books explored, many touched on the aspect of immigration and the border between Mexico and the United States as a factor or cause of family separation.

The dynamics of *family* in Latinx communities in both the stories read and the stories lived in the everyday life of Latinx communities today illustrate the complexities of the concept of family, especially through that struggle of having borders physically separate children from loved ones. Situations such as crossing into the United States to acquire the American Dream, refuge, or a better opportunity, also play a crucial and complex factor in the separation of families. Families don't want to be separated, but sometimes families cross into the United States illegally or legally, seeking help from coyotes or from families already established in the United States, thus, risking the chance to be separated from family members.

Around February, news reports described camps in Arizona and Texas where hundreds of migrant children were held in captivity. The children, who come from Central America or Mexico, cross the border to reunite with their family members who already live in the U.S. and some cross with their families to the United States for a better life. Whether they crossed illegally or to seek refuge, the families found themselves separated at the border. Some parents were sent back, while children stayed behind. At the same time of the report, students were exploring the text set of books which also reflected or illustrated experiences of immigration and seeking refuge.

The news explained that as children cross the border, the border patrol collect these children and place them into camps that look more like cages and many children never reunite with their family members again. The children don't receive education or get to play outside. Instead, they sit in fear as they are excluded from society and disconnected from their loved ones.

Coincidentally, students in the classroom brought up the news reports in their conversations while at the same time reflecting on their own experiences. For example, in a



literature discussion group in February, Lupita shared “It’s sad that people don’t let people cross over here and that they separate people.”

Manuel in a different literature discussion group at the same time, stated his concern for his father whom has often crossed the border. He talked about being scared for his father and whether he would see him again. To him, family separation was frightening. He missed his father and feared for his father’s life crossing into the scorching hot desert.

Manuel’s father crossed into the border of Mexico and back into the United States multiple times for work. The response or consequence in this case had become fear of the possibility for his father to be separated from him. Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez and James Greenberg (2005) describe the complexities of crossing the border through the lens of Mexican families, like Manuel’s:

*Because many Mexicans work in highly unstable labor markets, in their struggle to make a living they are not only forced to crisscross national boundaries, but they must also depend on one another to gain access to resources found on each side. (p. 52)*

Manuel understands that his father’s reason for crossing back and forth between Mexico and the United States is for work. As Manuel’s father seeks resources to support his family on both sides of the border, the fear of crisscrossing causes fear for Manuel, while Lupita feels sadness for those crossing over and being separated in the process.

For Paulo, borders as a factor for separating families resulted in a powerful reflection and response. In this image, Paulo illustrates a wall separating two groups of people. (see Figure 3.2)

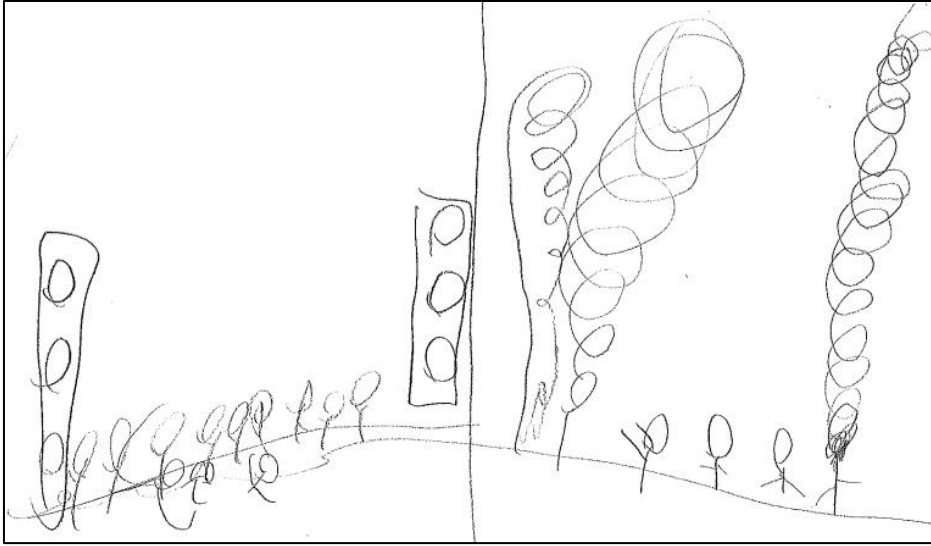


Figure 3.2. Paulo's sketch to stretch of the border and chaos

This figure can be interpreted as families separated by a border. On both sides of the border or "wall," the families are in turmoil because they are not together. They are trying to find a way to get to each other. The scribbles can be interpreted as screams going up to the sky so that the family on the other side of the wall can hear them. This image could also be interpreted as anger and hate towards those on the other side of the wall. The figures drawn can be families related to each other or could be opposing people. Yet, there is a feeling of desperation as a wall separating the two groups of people is strongly felt through Paulo's sketch to stretch example for the discussion on *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh.

*Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* is a story where the main character, a boy, anticipates his father's arrival from the United States back to Mexico. When his father doesn't arrive, he seeks to find his dad. This concept of being with family and the consequences of being separated brought a response of responsibility to find the father.

For Valentín, the responsibility to seek your father and provide him food, as the main character sought to give food to his father, was an important component to reflect upon. The student wrote the following (see Figure 3.3):

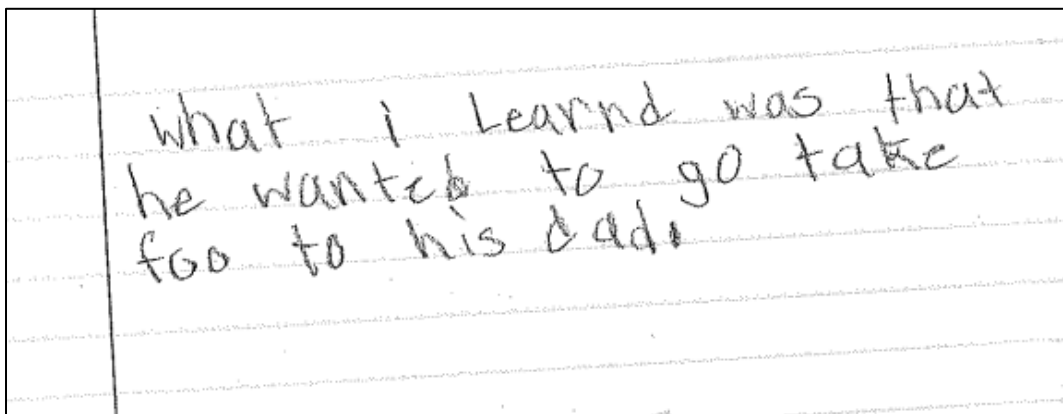


Figure 3.3. Valentín's response to *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*

Valentín's response shares that the consequence of family separation can be risking one's life. The border plays a role in family separation and seeking to reunite with family may result in danger. Valentín, however, doesn't focus on the negative aspects for the character seeking out for his dad. Instead, both the character and Valentín think about the value of reuniting with the father as well as providing him food.

Food is so meaningful to Valentín and the Latinx community overall. Food brings family together and this student hits on that. Both the character Pancho Rabbit and the child think about the importance of getting the plate of food to Pancho Rabbit's father. Not only is food nurturing, but it is also a reminder of home and the culture and that is something that this character wants to do: give food to his dad.

In May, students explored the first chapters of *La Linea* by Ann Jaramillo. The novel follows Miguel as he crosses the border to reunite with his father and mother who are in the United States. As students explored these chapters, they had powerful discussions and hope for

Miguel to reunite with his family. Students asked: “what is going to happen to him?” and “I wonder if he is ever going to reunite with his parents?” In one of my journal entries, I wrote the following:

*The students are anxious for Miguel. They are really immersed in the story as they share their hopes for Miguel reuniting with his family. In one group discussion, Lupita shared that she too would risk her life to reunite with her parents. “I would want to be with them” she shared. Lili and Aren agreed. Meanwhile, Juan shared his fears for Miguel crossing to find his family because he knows that the border patrol and the coyotes could be dangerous. Santiago loves the book because he says it reminds him of his parent’s journey and his feelings as his parents are often crossing between Mexico and the United States and he barely sees them.*

Students knew that the line drawn in the sand, in this case the border, draws family apart. Some may not be able to cross and those that do risk their lives and chances of ever seeing their family again. Students reflected and deeply thought about immigration being a risk to lose contact with family, all the while, immigration and crossing the borders can provide hope for a better life and to reunite with loved ones already living in the United States.

In a graffiti board collected in the first week of February on *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*, Genesis drew this image to share that she felt sad that families were separated. She illustrated this through drawing Pancho Rabbit crying (see Figure 3.4).

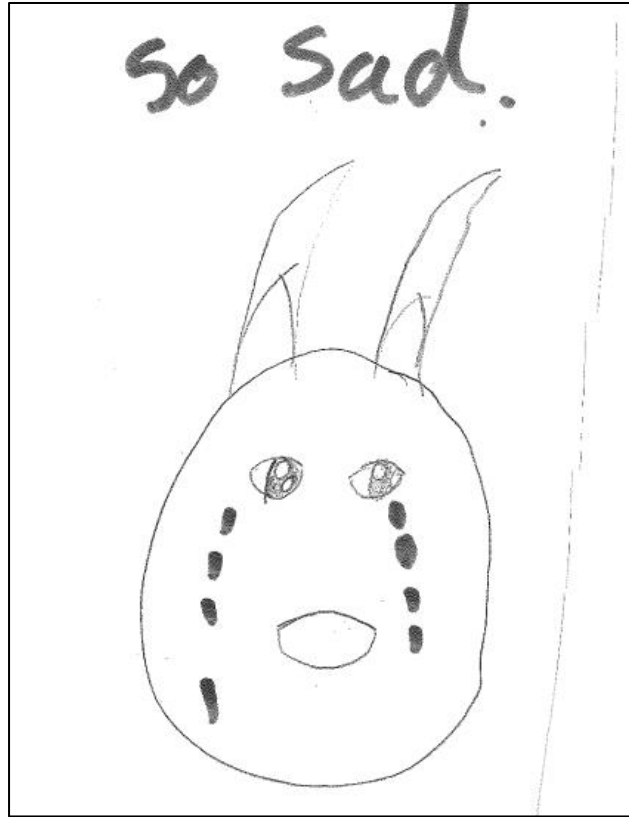


Figure 3.4. Genesis' response to *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*

The graffiti board is an example to illustrate the sadness that is felt when family is separated. Again, the border plays a role in the separation, as the father is in the United States and his family is in Mexico.

There was one student who responded quite differently from his peers during this discussion. Aren, a White boy in the group within this discussion, did not have the experiences or connections of his Latinx peers. Aren was born and lived in the U.S. with his family. He didn't understand his peers' feelings about being separated from family, much less feel the impact that the border had on his peers. Instead he found the border a place of security for his family, while his peers saw it as a method for family separation. Aren along with his classmates became aware of their differences and learned from each other through their responses.

## Separation of Families as Refugees

Many Latinx students can relate to the idea of leaving your country for safety. One student at the beginning of January who only stayed with the class shortly, before moving to another school, expressed her experience being a refugee. Her family had come from Mexico in January in the hopes of finding asylum. Her father had been killed by the *mafia* in Mexico and her family was found to be in danger. Her father had worked with drug cartel since she was a baby; her mother had not approved of this and separated from her father shortly after finding out his relationship to the drug cartel. Despite the separation, the cartel went after her father and killed him. The mother feared for her children's lives, so she made arrangements to come to the United States and seek asylum, which she was granted. The conversation arose during a literature discussion in January around *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna.

Brianna was a very shy girl and didn't express very much, but as her group explored the text, she found connections to her life's story. She only spoke Spanish, but found value and comfort in a text, written in English, with a story like hers. In *The Journey* the book follows a mother and her son and daughter becoming refugees and seeking help to leave their country. The father in the text is portrayed as lost or dead. The mother and her children are on their own. For Brianna, this reminded her of her mother as she too lost her father and has a younger brother.

In *The Journey* the mother and her children leave their families behind, as Brianna must have left her uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins, and many family members behind. In my teacher journal notes, I made quick notes of the following interaction:

*María who was in Brianna's group at the time asked: "was it hard?" Brianna answered: "si es muy duro" (yes, it's really hard). "I'm so sorry" María said (María could understand Spanish but not speak it). I could feel Brianna's fear. She felt lost, lonely, and missed her father. The students quietly viewed Brianna's facial expression as she glanced over the pages of the book.*

Brianna's interactions with the books didn't last long. The next day, after just meeting her, she moved to another school. We never saw her again. Her story, although short, resounded around the room to demonstrate that what the books illustrated was not a fairy tale or fiction, it was reality. For the students, Brianna's story was real, and it was important.

As students explored *The Journey*, many students noted the fear of crossing the border and leaving your home behind. Images of these reflections are described in another theme as those reflections and sketch to stretch examples fit closely with the fear of crossing the border and the border itself, since the family encounters borders in their journey.

### **Living In A Different Country From Your Family**

Families can find themselves separated when living in a different country from their family. Many Latinx students, myself included, were born in the United States, yet the extended family and even close family members in some situations, may live in a different country. For these students, many family members live in Mexico, where on the other hand, they live in the United States. Paula's extended family for instance, lives in El Salvador, while she lives in the U.S. with her close family.

*Dear Primo* by Duncan Tonatiuh is about two cousins who live in two different countries, one in the United States and the other in Mexico. The cousins write letters to each other to keep in contact. Valentín notes the cousins miss each other and questions how celebrations take place when they are so far apart (see Figure 3.5)

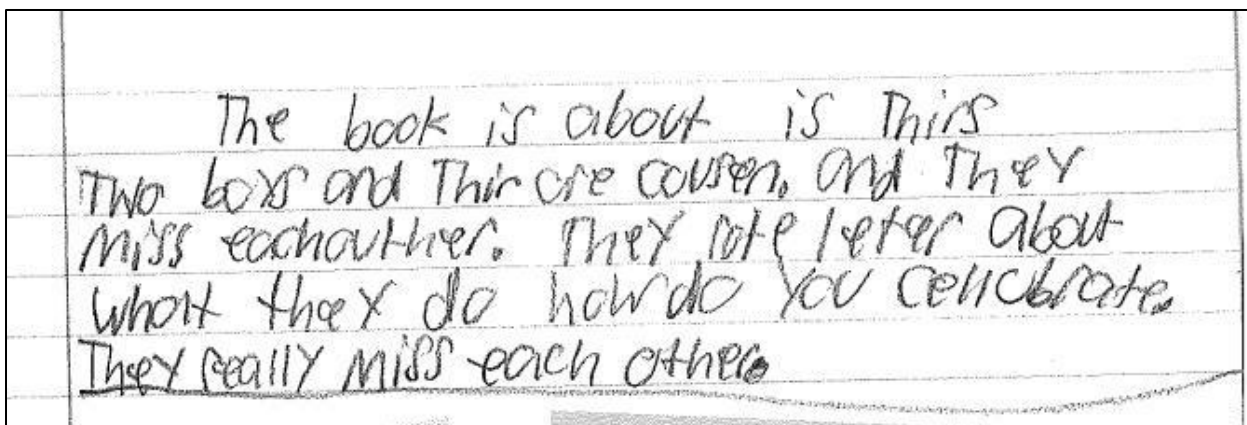


Figure 3.5. Valentín's reflection on *Dear Primo*

Valentín really thinks about being so far away from someone you love. He even questions, “how can you celebrate when you are not together?” The celebrations could be interpreted as family gatherings or parties such as quinceañeras, etc. Valentin finds it questionable that families can be separated because they need to celebrate together.

In February, students read *My Diary from Here to There* by Amada Irma Perez in their literature discussion circles, which follows a girl and her family moving to the United States and leaving a best friend behind.

For many Latinx communities, friends become family, and living in the United States and having someone you love live back in Mexico, such as in the book, is difficult. Paula, for example, shared in the literature discussion circle,

*“I would miss my best friend if I had to move away from her. This makes me so sad.” Paula shared her concerns with moving away from her friend. She is upset that the girls whom grew up together would now have to be apart. “I mean I get it, they are moving to have a better life, but people get left behind.”*

In *Waiting for Papá* by René Colato Laínez, students shared their feelings about Beto being away from his father as they live in the United States and they await their father's arrival from El Salvador. Beto writes his father a letter, which he reads over the radio, which in the end,



allows Beto the opportunity to see his father again. Because of time, this book was not read in small groups. Instead it was read with the entire class and the students quickly wrote and/or drew a response to the book. Students found this compelling and Lupita even cried. In my teacher reflection journal, I wrote:

*Lupita found this story powerful and relatable to her. "My dad was in jail and I had not seen him in so many years. I know how Beto feels and when he found his dad and they were reunited it reminded me of how I felt when I saw my dad again." The class stared in awe at Lupita. She's someone all the students look up to. No one would have ever imagined that this was something she was going through. She always has a smile in her face. Today, we got to learn a little bit about Lupita's reality.*

Many students found this text very powerful. Valentín illustrated the reunion of the father and son in his reflection along with sharing the moment the dad comes back (see Figure 3.6)

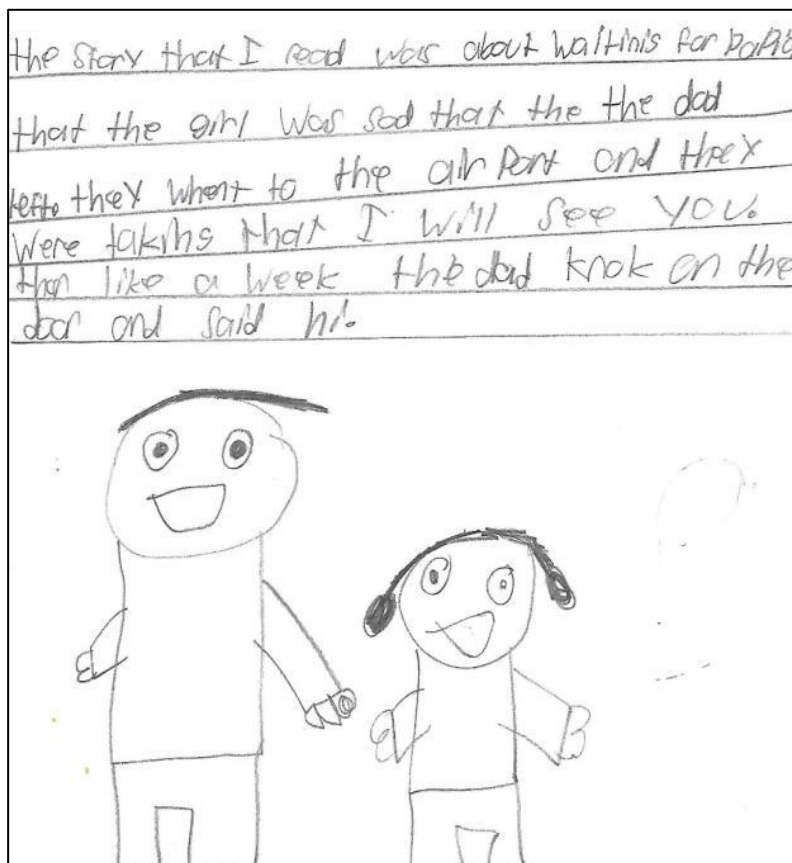


Figure 3.6. Valentín's response to *Waiting for Papá*

For many students like Valentín, having your parents and family close matters. It brings safety, security, and a sense of belonging.

The examples in this section involve a close explanation of family separation, particularly, how families may be separated and the ways in which that may affect the family. There are causes and consequences or results in separating families. Families are separated at the border, during the process of immigration, leaving as refugees to come to another country and leaving family behind, or merely moving and living in the United States and the rest of the family living in another country. In the case of the students' reflections and responses, being separated from your family is difficult and sad. For students who know the struggle and some, who can relate to this situation, it is better to stay together than to be apart. When observing a graffiti board around this discussion the following image was drawn, which shines light into the value of a family being together (see figure 3.7)

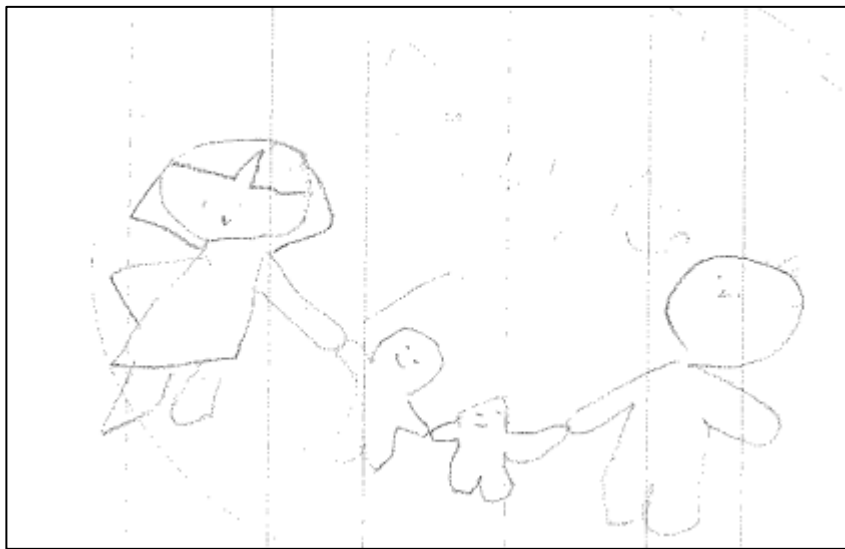


Figure 3.7. Carlos' graffiti board drawing of a family with the word family written

The image is difficult to see clearly as it was drawn lightly with pencil, but the image clearly shows a mother holding hands with her children who hold hands with the father. This is interpreted as a link or a chain just to show how close family can be and mean for the Latinx and

non-Latinx communities alike. In addition, Carlos brings a little bit of his own wishes into the drawing that he created for this graffiti board as his father lives in Mexico and he lives here with his mother. For Carlos, the struggle of not having his father around because he is here in the United States while his father is away in Mexico is difficult. Carlos believes that family should be together, not separated and his response clearly depicts that. Many more examples of family came into the conversations on all the books, but I found it meaningful to share just these few examples. Children find family to be an important aspect in this experience and so when reading about those concepts in books sharing with each other, they dug deeply into those conversations of what it really means to have a family, become a part of one, and the sadness of being separated from your loved ones and how that can affect you.

### **The Dangers of Crossing The Border**

Living closely to the border in Tucson, Arizona, the issues around the border wall between Mexico and Arizona can become a crucial component in the lives of Latinx communities living in the area. The border is a reminder that Mexico is not a part of the United States.

Latinx people often might cross the border during summer vacations to visit family, but at the same time the border can be a reminder that there is a wall too big to cross to see loved ones. The border is also a reminder of the danger one may encounter when crossing it. Even though many may cross the border illegally, those who cross it legally may also find themselves at risk in encountering these dangers.

Borders are not just physical for the Latinx community but can also be internal. Latinx people living in the United States, myself included, often find borders within their identities, as

they live two cultures, two languages, and two identities. For Mexican Americans the question becomes: are we Mexican or are we American? If we don't speak strong Spanish, we don't fit in as Mexicans and if we don't speak strong English, we may not be considered American. It's a tough situation. During the research, SEI classroom teachers were expected to teach solely in English, and yet the curriculum I sought to develop in the classroom, crossed a border in itself to invite the voices of the Latinx community and to use bilingual books or books around the Latinx experience.

The books resonated with students and became a vital component in the development of the literacy instruction, because the books were relevant and responsive. Geneva Gay (2018) expresses the classroom must be culturally responsive to students in a classroom. One important aspect in her work is the value she finds in *stories* that students bring. She cites Folwer (2006) with the following statement:

*In other words, stories educate us about ourselves and others; they capture our attention on a very personal level, and entice us to see, know, desire, imagine, construct, and become more than what we currently are. (p. 3)*

Thus, crossing borders in the classroom to discuss the borders of the real world around the Latinx community, gave value to the knowledge students possess, their funds of knowledge, experiences, and transactions with the texts. In addition, Gay (2018) adds that:

*Stories are means for individuals to projects and present themselves, declare what is important and valuable, give structure to perceptions, make general facts more meaningful to specific personal lives, connect the self with others, proclaim the self as a cultural being, develop a healthy sense of self, forge new meanings and relationships, or build community.(p.3)*

So, when students explored borders closely, their stories, reflections, emotions, and experiences became a crucial component to the conversation of expressing the social issues that mattered to them the most. In this case, borders was a strong concept that was frequently

discussed. Specifically, students shared their fears about the dangers some face in crossing the border. In Figure 3.8, three subthemes around the dangers one may encounter when crossing the border are shown:

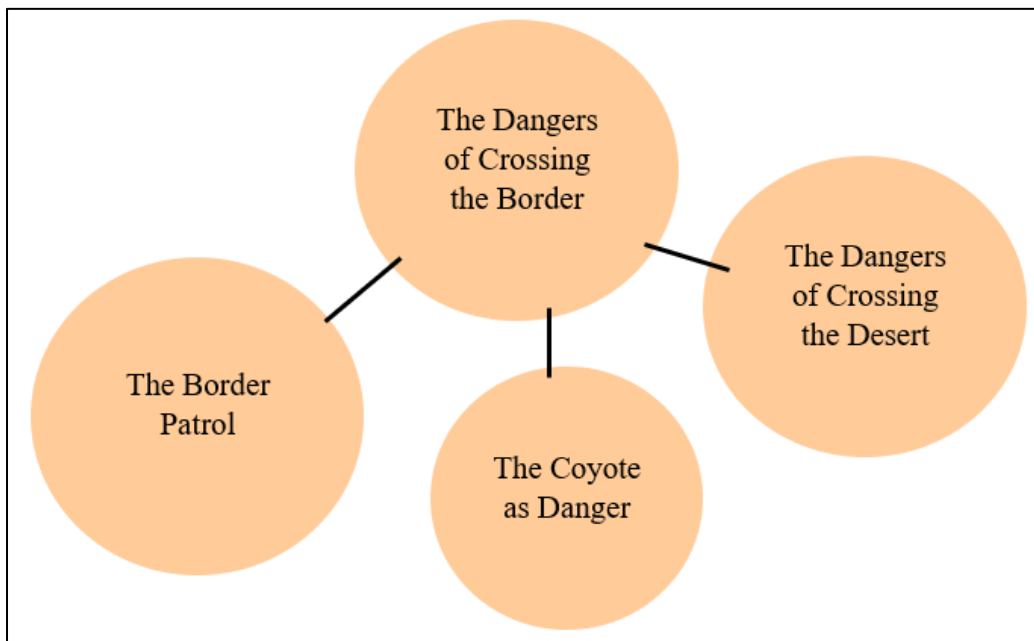


Figure 3.8. Web of the theme on *The Dangers of Crossing the Border*

In the first theme *The Causes and Consequences of Separating Families*, borders became a factor in separating families. The students talked about the risk of being separated from your family by crossing borders, but students also understood the reasons why borders needed to be crossed in those situations. Sometimes borders needed to be crossed. Crossing the border for the Latinx community in this case, is the opportunity to acquire a better life, obtain safety (as is the case with refugees), work, reuniting with families and earning basic living necessities such as food, clothing, etc. Yet, students shared the dangers that play into crossing the border.

In the section discussing families, the border was a cause into families being separated. However, the students also noted that borders provided other dangers than just separating families. Students noted that borders could also be dangerous because of the people around the

border such as border patrol, coyotes, and the dangers of attempting to cross in the desert heat. This section looks closely at the dangers of crossing the border and how those dangers impact many Latinx people. As this section is closely explored, there is some overlap into the theme of families because the dangers of the border does indeed affect Latinx families and the students reiterate on that statement.

### **The Border Patrol**

The border patrol has played a significant role in the lives of Latinx communities. The border patrol is scary. Students hear stories of the border patrol taking away children from their parents and separating family. The news in February shared a story of camps located in Arizona and Texas where migrant children were being held. The children heard of ICE and reports of President Donald Trump talking about “building a wall” and “sending illegal Mexicans back”.

As a result, the border patrol was something that was drawn, referenced, and reflected upon during the literature discussion circles. In one graffiti board around *Dreamers* and *The Journey* students connected those stories to the everyday reality that they see on the news and in their communities. For example, in Figure 3.9, Carlos draws the border, where in one side of the wall is an image of a man, and on the other side is a bigger image of a man wearing a red hat, with a speech bubble in Spanish saying: “*no cruze la frontera*”.

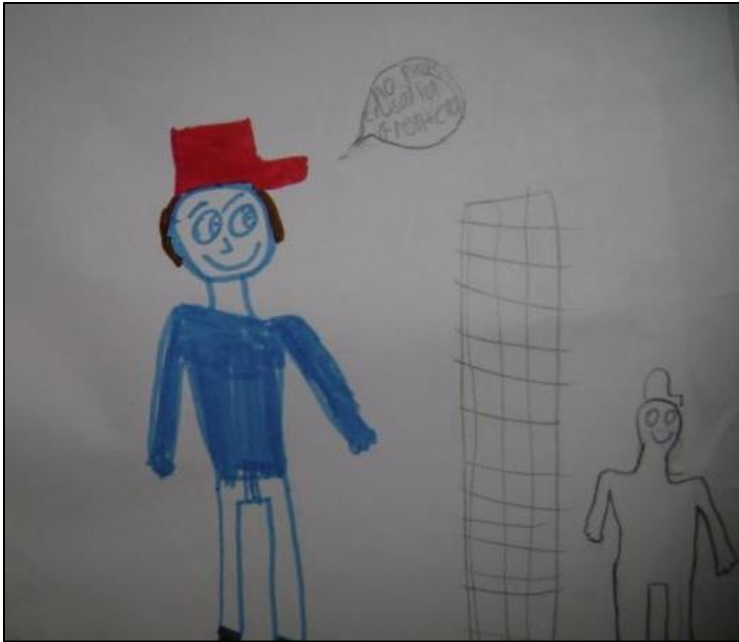


Figure 3.9. Carlos' Response to *The Journey*

The image can be interpreted as the border patrol having power. Mexico also has border patrol, so this can be border patrol from Mexico or from the United States who speak Spanish. In either case, the border patrol is drawn slightly bigger than the male figure attempting to cross the border. The border patrol's size can be interpreted as having more power and dominance and privilege than the person attempting to cross the border.

More images of the border patrol were drawn in the literature discussion groups around *The Journey* and *Dreamers*. Valentin drew this image, where again a male figure is drawn bigger than the wall and the saguaro cactus. The words: "Don't cross border" is seen on along with the image of a sun at the top. There appears to be small people at the feet of the border patrol agent, which can be interpreted as migrants or immigrants. On the shirt of the border patrol, the words: "can't cross the border" are written and is also found in the speech bubble of the border patrol. Interestingly, the words "can't cross the border" appear three times in this single image and is

displayed in different ways. It is found in the shirt of the border patrol, in his speech, and it is found on the other side of the wall (see Figure 3.10)



Figure 3.10. Valentín's response to *The Journey and Dreamers*

For students the concept and meaning of borders and people on the other side of the border not allowing others to cross is significant. The message becomes clear that no one is to cross over. Interestingly the people saying that in both Figure 3.9 and Figure 3.10 are drawn bigger than the people trying to cross over. Again, this can be interpreted as border patrol having power and bringing a sense of fear and danger to those trying to cross over.

In *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna, Juan illustrates this (see Figure 3.11), which replicates a similar illustration in the picture book. In *The Journey*, the mother and her two children are attempting to cross a wall as they seek refuge from their previous home. They are no longer safe so they leave their country and attempt to cross the wall in order to find safety. In the



book, there is a red headed man who points that they need to go back. In the graffiti board, Juan decided to recreate this powerful image. In both the book and the graffiti board image, the “border patrol” or “security” is drawn bigger, pointing the family to go back.



Figure 3.11. Juan’s response to *The Journey*

In the audio recording students discussing these books, the dialogue focused on the “wall” and “border,” specifically the dangers around it. The students found the border questionable and did not understand the purpose of the border or the wall. The conversation took place the week of January 21<sup>st</sup> through the 25<sup>th</sup>, when students engaged in a conversation about borders and questioning their purpose. Again the conversation is around *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna and *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales:

**Me:** We’re going to pass this around (audio recorder). We’re going to talk about Dreamers or The Journey or whatever you want.

**Lupita** I have 2 questions about both of these stories. Why have a border when billions of people are crossing it every year?

**Me:** What do you guys think? She said: “Why have a border when people are crossing it every year?”

**Lili:** I definitely think it's a waste of money to make the border

**Lili:** Well, I think it's just a waste of money because like she said people are just gonna keep on crossing over and crossing over

**Valentín:** And its gonna be a waste of time

**Lili:** exactly...a waste of time and money

**Valentín:** It's gonna be a waste of time

**Paula:** I don't have anything to say

In this brief conversation students did not hold a deep conversation about the border, but began to question its intentions and purpose. Lili and Valentín's response can be interpreted as opposed to having a border as they both agree that it is a waste of time, and a waste of money. They understand what the border does, and do not agree with its purpose. As the conversation developed, Lupita shared a comment that made the group think about the purpose of the border patrol and the wall overall.

**Lupita:** Mexicans are like the pitbulls miss and the other people are different types of dogs. See pitbulls are always seen as aggressive by other dogs.

**Paula:** I have a problem with that.

**Lupita** (*pauses and looks at Paula*)

**Paula:** don't compare Mexicans with pitbulls

**Lili:** Yeah! That's messed up.

**Me:** What if she didn't mean it like that? Maybe its's a metaphor

**Lupita:** It is a metaphor Miss, I'm saying that people see us that way

**Long Pause**

**Valentín:** Like white people versus brown people. Like in *The Journey* they are white people crossing the border and in the *Dreamers* they are like Mexicans.

**Me:** Yeah?

**Valentín:** Well they both cross borders and go through the same things

**Me:** That's true, very interesting. They are escaping the hardships of their countries

Lupita was trying to express something with her metaphor of dogs being like pitbulls and the rest of the people being other kind of dogs. The group didn't agree with the use of her terminology, and she was unable to explain herself clearly. It wasn't until analyzing her graffiti board that I was able to see what she really meant. She wrote:

*It's like dogs, the Mexicans ar the pitbulls ad the white people are regular dogs. The pitbulls have the bad definition and the other dogs have a good definition.*

When I talked to Lupita about her response, she told me that she knew that Mexicans are viewed as "bad people" and that they are caged like unwanted animals or dogs. They couldn't cross over, but she did not understand why. She doesn't see Mexicans as bad people and she was trying to understand why others would see them that way. She wrote in the graffiti board: "Why have borders when people cross it every day?" This could be interpreted as, what is the point of having borders if people will cross anyway. Lupita might cross the border with her family regularly and see it pointless to have a check in and check out system from the border patrol.

Lupita also wrote in yellow: "Take a stand everybody should have freedom!" She doesn't dehumanize Mexicans, as she identifies as Mexican herself, she just doesn't understand why others would view Mexicans badly, when she knows they aren't bad. She doesn't understand why some people are seen as bad and others are not, and her reflection is informative of her perception of skin color and racism, which is explored closely in another theme.

Paula on the other hand, is upset about Lupita's reference of Mexicans to pitbulls. Paula returned to the graffiti board and responded to Lupita in the following image (Figure 3.12):

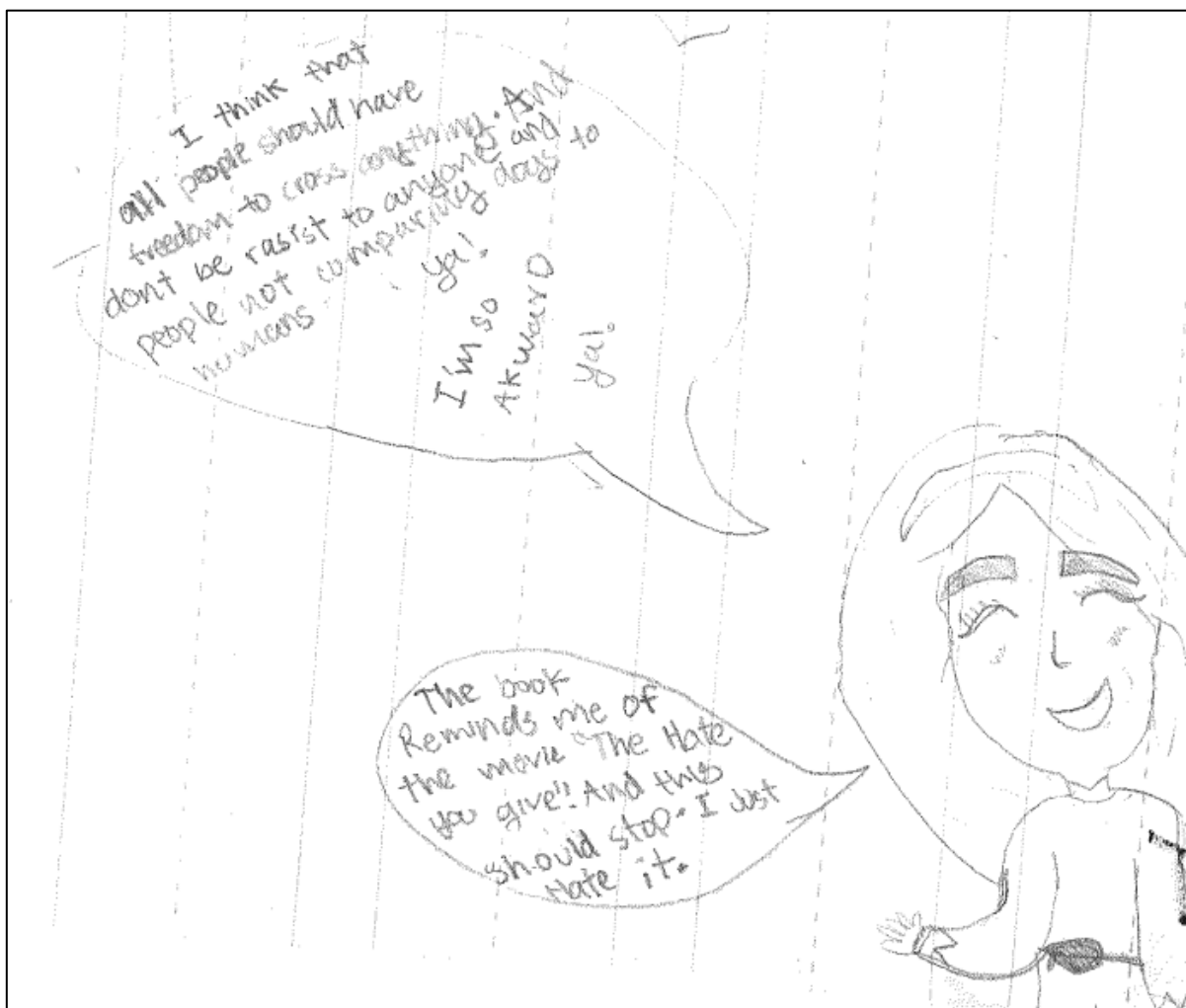


Figure 3.12. Paula's graffiti board in response to Lupita's comment

Although Lupita and Paula approached the conversation differently and used metaphors to express their ideas, their responses were not that different. They both saw the effects of having a border and the border patrol and made references to an aspect of racism. This will be explored closely under a different theme.

In this subtheme, the border patrol played crucial roles in the conversations among Latinx students. Students understand that the border patrol is part of a system of control and

power and in return, critique that system. Paulo Freire (1970) states: “The oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality” (p.52) . In this case, students understand that there is a form of oppression through the use and role of the border patrol and through critically thinking about this that they will be able to reflect and act upon reality. Students may not have radically changed the world, but they opened their lenses critically. Freire (1970) adds, “ Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world.” (p. 81) Students’ authentic reflections allowed them to deeply think about the role and the dangers the border patrol represent.

### **The Coyote as Danger**

When one seeks to cross the border, in this case from Mexico into the United States, many migrants seek the help of a *coyote*. A *coyote* is an experienced person who helps people cross the border without getting caught. Yet, the *coyote* may be dangerous, as many are known to leave people behind, kill their clients, harm them, steal from them, etc. Students in the classroom often talked about coyotes. In one incident I wrote in my teacher reflection journal:

*Santiago said that a coyote brought his family into the United States. “You pay them to bring you here” he said as I asked the students if they knew what a coyote is. He shared that some people fear coyotes as they can be deceiving and many can be murderers. Another student shared that she worried for her mother as she would be crossing the border with the help of a coyote. Trust seems like something that becomes an obstacle because you don’t know if you can trust the coyote to really take you to where you need to go.*

In responding to *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh, Genesis draws what is occurring in today’s society as she reflects and reads the text. In the book, Pancho Rabbit goes out to find his father while bringing a plate of food in his bag so that his father can eat. The coyote offers to help Pancho Rabbit find his father as long as Pancho Rabbit feeds him. When

the food runs out, the coyote attempts to eat Pancho Rabbit. Genesis drew the image of a coyote and what looks to be like the president Donald Trump (see Figure 3.13)



Figure 3.13. Response by Genesis to *Pancho Rabbit and The Coyote*

Genesis' drawing of the coyote is similar to the discussions and tricky coyote in the book who took advantage of Pancho Rabbit. She shares an image next to the coyote of President Donald Trump, drawn with puckered lips and blonde hair, being crossed out with the words: "no more trump" written above. This can be interpreted as Donald Trump being blamed for millions of people getting hurt crossing the border or approaching danger to cross the border. She seems to be saying that if Donald Trump was not president, there would be less border patrol and less monitoring of the border, resulting in less deaths and injuries at the border. Other students also

drew the coyote in their responses in their graffiti boards, such as Adán's drawing (see Figure 3.14).

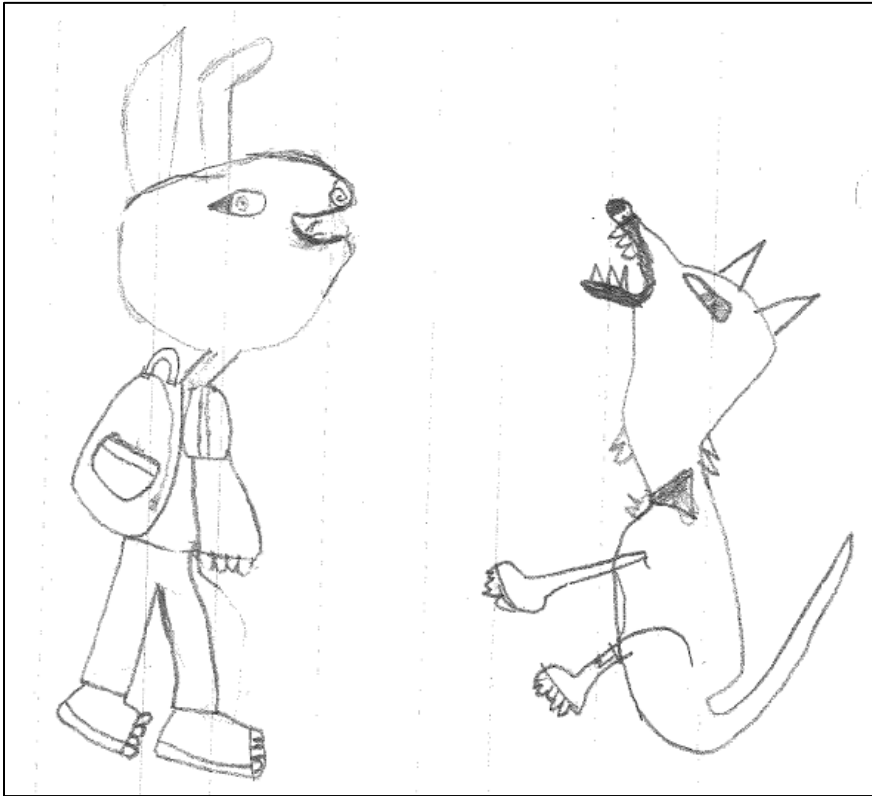


Figure 3.14. Adán's response to *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*.

This figure illustrates the coyote with sharp teeth facing Pancho Rabbit. Pancho Rabbit faces towards the coyote as well. The coyote can be interpreted as challenging, but Pancho Rabbit can also be interpreted as insistent in crossing the border to find his father, which may also reflect the everyday situations many migrants might face as they cross the border.

### **The Dangers of Crossing the Desert**

Crossing the desert can be dangerous. The temperature for instance is a factor that can make crossing the desert unbearable. In one conversation in a literature discussion, students were interested in my experiences with crossing the border. In my journal entry I wrote the following:

*Today I shared with students my volunteer experiences at a medical clinic where I encountered a man whom was dehydrated and had a wound from the desert. He had just*

*crossed the border to reunite with his family, but along the way he had encountered heat, scorpions, lack of water, and fever. The students eagerly listened and shared stories of similar experiences with family and friends. The man had a wound under his arm, where the doctor and I needed to take action as we saw his bravery throughout the procedure to care for his wound. His bravery and determination to find his family amidst the heat and risking his life was inspirational to me at the time as it was once again as the students listened to the story.*

This conversation which occurred in January, resulted in conversations about crossing the desert. This was revisited in May as we read *La Linea*, where Miguel would also find himself crossing the border in the future. During the read aloud, Juan stated: “I don’t know how he is going to do it Miss, crossing the border in the hot sun?” The concern of the heat was evident in January as well as in May. The desert is dangerous, especially the heat that one must endure just to cross into the United States. Genesis drew the following image after drawing about *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* (see Figure 3.15)



Figure 3.15. Genesis’ Response to *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*

Her image is a reminder that the desert lacks water and shade from the sun. There are only two clouds illustrated and the landscape of the Sonoran Desert is portrayed. The sign that



reads no rain today, lies true to the environment of the desert, but gives a feeling of fear and anticipating the worse because there is no water in the desert.

Death is common for many who attempt to cross the border because of the heat. In the same graffiti board Carlos drew the following image, where a figure is drawn with a slash across the body, indicating that the person is dead due to heat ( see Figure 3.16)

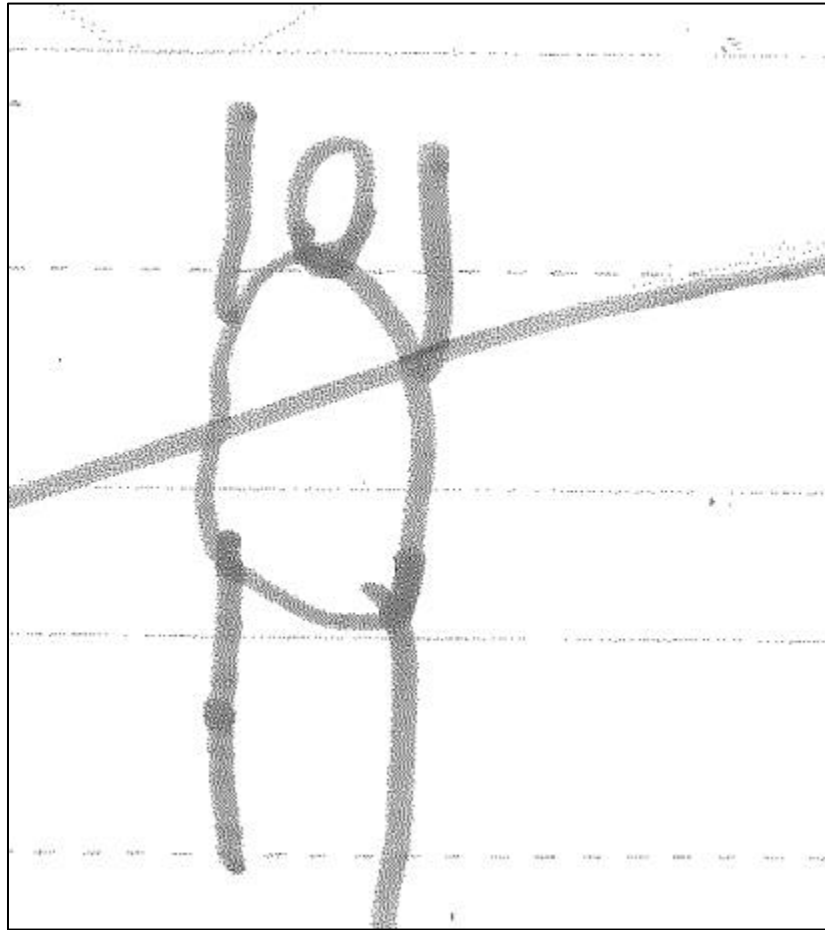


Figure 3.16. Carlos' response to *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*

In a written response to extend on the graffiti board, Roberto who was also in the group at that time, wonders how his parents must have crossed the border. Knowing the dangers and obstacles with crossing the border he expresses his wonder and concern how his parents and tata crossed the border to come to the United States: (see Figure 3.17)

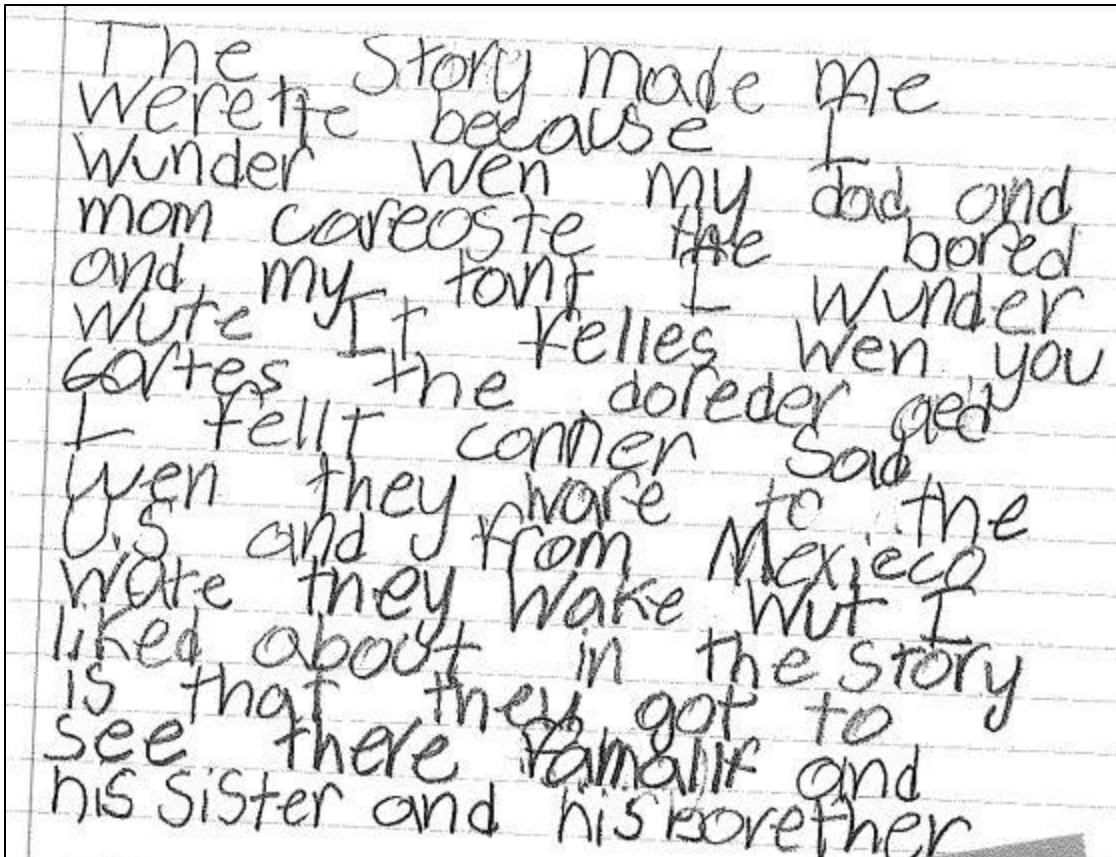


Figure 3.17. Roberto's Response to *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*

["The story made me worried because I wonder when my dad and mom crossed the border and my tata. I wonder what it feels when you cross the border and I felt kind of sad when they were going to the U.S. and from Mexico. What's they wake, what I liked about the story is that they go to see their family and his sister and his brother."]

Roberto's response and the students' conversation are an example that no matter what direction we take in our experiences as Latinx communities in the U.S. and in our classrooms and books, borders will be a part of the conversation as something we will see value in talking about as Latinx community members in the United States. The conversations are present, and they are as valid and valuable as ever. Students find talking about borders and walls meaningful. It's in our backyard, we live borders in our everyday lives, the majority of us had family members cross borders to give us a better way of life. Students know that, they see that, and they want to talk about that.

### The Dreams and Hopes of Crossing the Border

Just as Latinx people have borders and obstacles to cross, we also have dreams and hopes for a better future, for our families, for our homes and our everyday lives. We aspire to grow up to have good jobs that are stable to provide for our families. We hope and dream to provide our families with the best. We aspire to acquire a new life that will give us equality, freedom, liberty, peace, and so much more. Just as our forefathers in the United States sought for Americans to have basic human rights, many migrants, immigrants, and people from all over the world seek to find and obtain the same.

Why do hundreds, maybe thousands, of people cross the border to come to the United States? One word: *freedom*. A valuable yet, basic humanistic principle. In this theme students noted and reflected on hopes and dreams as the main reasons for why many cross the border into the United States. The theme is described below with subthemes that students touched on the most in their reflections, dialogues, written responses, and sketch to stretch artifacts (see Figure 3.18).

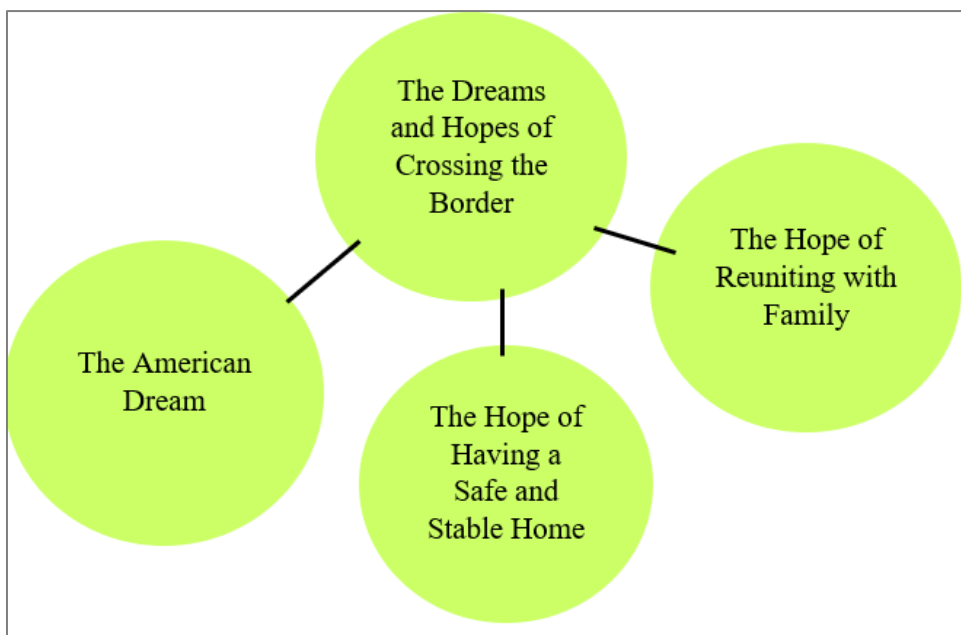


Figure 3.18. The web for the theme The Dreams and Hopes of Crossing the Border with its subthemes.

For Latinx communities, crossing the border brings a sense of security from the dangers in their current countries. Crossing the border allows families to seek asylum and security. For Brianna, coming to the United States was a step towards safety as her family was in danger if they were to stay behind. Crossing the border means getting closer to the “American Dream.” It means having a home and living a better life than the one left behind. Finally, crossing the border reunites you with loved ones. Many families are separated from each other. Some families already live in the United States whereas others live in another country. Thus, crossing the border becomes a pathway to reunite with loved ones.

### **The American Dream**

Many who cross the border seek to find and live out “The American Dream.” For these students, the “American Dream” represented a better life, where families could own their own homes, have food on the table, clothes, and the basic necessities of life, while at the same time, prosper. The “American Dream” represented an opportunity to create your own business, obtain success, and live better, than how one was raised. Parents teach their children to be “better” and to pursue success, so that they do not “make the same mistakes” or end up “washing dishes, like their mother”. The students were aware of the purposes many decide to cross the border and in many instances, students shared their experiences or family stories of crossing the border.

In a discussion captured in January, students reflected on the border and the “wall” that President Donald Trump wanted to build. In the following conversation, students speak against President Donald Trump’s stance and reflect on borders and think about the world in general. In the dialogue, what is evident is that students know that the many reasons people cross into the United States are for a better life; at the same time, they understand that others, may not perceive it that way.

**Rosa:** Well my dad did cross the border

(silence)

**Sahid:** Well Donald Trump not liking them

(kids look around)

**Sahid:** Well it's very mean because this world is supposed to be free

**Rosa:** I think Donald Trump shouldn't build a border the immigrants don't have too much food

**María:** Maybe Donald Trump shouldn't build a wall

**Sahid:** This world used to be a free kingdom but so many people have changed this place too. People do drugs, Donald Trump is building a wall, but it's not the other people's fault [he was referring to people who don't do drugs]

The students were thinking deeply about the border wall after reading two powerful children's books that depicted immigration, *The Journey* and *Dreamers*. Rosa, for instance, began by sharing her own experience with her father crossing the border in the past and then Sahid took a critical stance as he thinks and questions the president's actions when he talks about the world needing to be a "free kingdom".

As the conversation continued, Sahid continued stating that Donald Trump does not like immigrants, while Rosa inputs her idea that Donald Trump shouldn't build a border because of the lack of food many immigrants suffer from obtaining. She understands and shares that food is a necessity and many cross the border to obtain that.

María adds to this idea when she makes a point that Donald Trump should not build a wall and Sahid talks about the humanistic perspective that everyone should be free, but how someone's actions can ruin the experience for everyone. He understands that President Trump and many view "immigrants" as drug dealers, and Sahid states that not everyone is like that. Students discuss possible solutions, hoping that there could be possible solutions such as not building a wall. They reflect and think about making a better United States for everyone by

talking about the world being a free kingdom and how it is not like Sahid said: “not the other people’s fault.” Both Sahid and the students know that many cross the border for many reasons. Some may cross to sell drugs, but many cross to obtain a better life.

In *Under the Mesquite Tree* by Guadalupe Garcia McCall, a novel read in class in April, the main character’s mother is dying from cancer. Throughout the novel, students noted the mother’s push for her daughter to work hard so she can get a good job. In the novel, both the main character and her mother watch *telenovelas* and the mother knows that her daughter loves acting and takes drama classes in high school. She hopes for her daughter to find a job in acting, and as we read more in the story, the mother dies and the main character goes to college to obtain a better job so that she can support and help her family.

As students explored this novel in April, they shared that they too have memories of their parents aspiring something greater for them. In one of my teaching reflection journal entries I wrote:

*Juan really enjoyed the book. Today he shared with the class that the book reminded him of his mother and his family. His family pushes him to do well in school so that he doesn’t “end up like them”. He talked about his mom talking to him about college.*

In another entry in my teaching reflection weekly memo, we had taken a field trip to Camp Cooper. On the way to the trip, students saw beautiful homes. In this memo, dated in March, we had a conversation about poverty and working hard to break the cycle and reach towards success. Here was a real-life experience, where students were able to see beyond their neighborhoods and beyond the books explored in the classroom. They could not only reflect on what they had been reading and the lives they lived, but seek and hope and live the dreams of coming to the United States and what that means for many, in this case the Latinx community, I wrote:

*Here were the kiddos on the bus, kids just like me, who barely eat, like I barely ate because of lack of food, staring at these houses shouting at the beauty and imagining for themselves something like that one day.*

Later in my memo I wrote about a conversation I had with Romero as he expressed his amazement with what he was seeing and questioning how it could be possible:

*Romero looks at me and sits across from me on the bus and asks: "Ms. Serrano, do you think I will get to live in a house like that one day". I look at him, and really look at him and say: "Of course you will Romero, you will have one of these big houses one day. And I will be your neighbor living somewhere near you where we will have barbeques and we will remember where it all started." I smiled. "Wow!" he gasps looking all around to those beautiful houses. My parents used to and still do, drive me and my siblings around the nice neighborhoods. "You will have a house like this one day" my mom would say and still does. "Miss who lives in these houses?" Romero asks pulling at my sleeve. "Hard working people Romero. People who went to school and studied hard, they became teachers, professors, always, doctors, you name it!" I said. "Wow!" he gasped again. "All it takes Romero is a book, a determined mind, and all of your strength and passion to do well in school and little by little, you will have a house like this" I said as he looked at me and the house leading up to the Cooper Center. "Wow!" he gasped. For students like Romero and myself, obtaining a better life is a long-term goal that is*

dreamed of and hoped for. Living in the United States is a step towards that goal. For many trying to come to the United States and many already living here, the American Dream is something that is precious and desired. Taking that first step into crossing the border is a step towards that dream.

### **The Hope of Having a Safe and Stable Home**

Families may cross the border to seek refuge or safety from previous hardships in their previous homes. Some seek a stable home, a place to stay, work, and have a home. In *The Journey*, students noted the family trying to escape the hardships of their country to move to another one, where they can be safe. In the subthemes around family, Brianna shared a similar experience with her family moving from Mexico to the U.S. for safety.

As students read *The Journey* and *Dreamers*, Valentín shared that he was sad about the situations many families face, which force them to leave their old homes and countries to seek safety and refuge in another one. He reflected mostly on *The Journey* as he thought about the mother crossing over with her two children to escape violence.

Although *Dreamers* and *The Journey* are different books, representing different ethnic groups, Valentín understood the similarities between the two experiences and noted that both families desired to live a better life. In *Dreamers* the mother seeks a better life for her son as she teaches him to read and value education, whereas in *The Journey* the mother searches for a way out for her children of their current situation to keep them safe.

In *Amelia's Road*, Amelia is moving from state to state with her family to have a job. Her family works in farming as migrant workers and with every season there is a move. She wishes and hopes that she can have a stable place to live. In this book, Amelia is in the United States, but she still desires and dreams to have a home she can stay rooted in. Students noted this value as many illustrated the home that Amelia drew next to the tree where she planted a memory box for herself. Rosa, for example, drew the following (see Figure 3.19):





Figure 3.19. Rosa's response to *Amelia's Road* ["she wants to live in a house and she do not want to move place to places."]

For many, a stable home and safety from hardships becomes a dream and hope in crossing the border and coming into the United States. Although there are dangers when approaching the border, the hopes and dreams and aspirations are what drive the determination to cross the border, so that as Romero says, the American Dream can one day become a reality.

### **The Hope of Reuniting with Family**

During the reading of *Becoming Naomi León* by Pam Muñoz Ryan, students hoped for Naomi to reunite with her father and at the beginning of the book, the students wanted the same to happen with Skyla, her mother. In the novel, however, Naomi is let down in building a relationship with her mother, as her mother is an alcoholic. Naomi decides to seek for her father in an act against her mother's wishes to have custody over her.

In this novel, Naomi isn't crossing into the United States, instead, she crosses the border into Mexico to find her father, whom she hadn't seen in years. Her hope is that she finds her father so that her father may support Naomi in giving custody to Naomi's grandmother and because she wants to see her father. The novel powerfully illustrates the voice of a child, seeking for her father.

As the novel was read, students felt for Naomi and they too wished for her to find her father. Lili shared in the whole class read aloud, "I wish she finds her father" and when Naomi did, Lili cried.

In *La Linea*, students also hoped for Miguel to find his father, as Miguel hoped to cross the border from Mexico to the United States in hope to reunite with his father. Although the students and I never finished the book, there were many whole group conversations of students sharing their hopes for Miguel to reunite with his family.

In *Pancho Rabbit and The Coyote*, Pancho Rabbit is determined to cross the border to find his father and to give him food. He wants his father to reunite with the family as his father did not arrive for the party. Students reflected on this experience as well (see Figures 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, and 4.6) where they talked about the border separating families and families desiring to be together and reuniting.

The theme explored some of the hopes and dreams that lead many families to cross borders to come into the United States and for students .are compelling and relatable to talk about. The theme concludes with María's drawing replicating Amelia's image in *Amelia's Road*, where Amelia, longs for a home to live in and be rooted in (see Figure 3.20).



Figure 3.20. María's response to *Amelia's Road*

This image portrays the idea of the American Dream, the dream of finding a home where you will not only be safe, but will grow up in. For children as for Amelia, this is a very important dream and hope to have especially in the United States and as a reason for crossing the border to live in the United States. For immigrants crossing over to the United States, this is as much as a

dream as a hope for their own future, Latinx students who have experiences with this hope understand the concept, value, and sacrifice in reaching for this dream.

### **Racism of Marginalized Groups in the United States**

Racism affects marginalized groups living in the United States. For the Latinx students in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, racism was a key point in the children's literature discussions. The discussions made it clear that racism against marginalized groups in the United States is a continuous and common struggle. According to the students' discussions, racism against marginalized groups meant discriminating against someone based on skin color and ethnic background. The students viewed this racism as leading to acts of injustice and violence, such as placing a wall between Mexico and the United States.

Students communicated their thoughts about racism of marginalized groups in the United States within their sketch to stretch artifacts, self-reflections, written responses, graffiti boards, and discussions, at the same time, making connections to their real life experiences outside the classroom. In this theme, racism of marginalized groups in the United States is indicated as students present their voices, thoughts, feelings, and ideas surrounding the issue. Student examples are explored to demonstrate their powerful conversations and thinking around the issue.

Before delving into the student examples for this theme, a web mapping out the theme and its subthemes is shared. Racism of marginalized groups has two subthemes that the students found valuable to explore closely in their reflections and discussions. Many of the subthemes deal with the ways in which marginalized groups "feel" racism "is" taking place and the effects of racism against marginalized groups (see Figure 3.21)

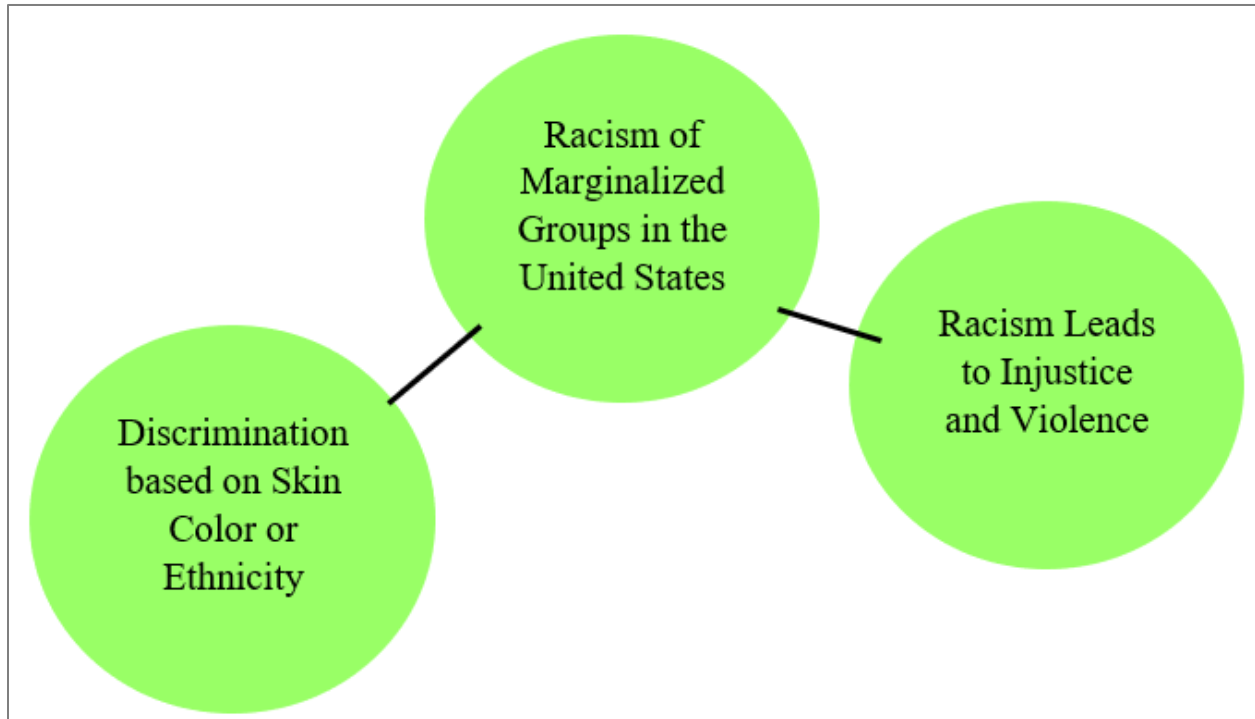


Figure 3.21. Web of the theme on Racism of Marginalized Groups in the United States

### **Discrimination Based on Skin Color or Ethnicity**

For these fourth and fifth grade students, racism meant discrimination against people of color or of a particular ethnicity. With that discrimination a sense of power became evident as students talked about discrimination as a pathway for those who are discriminating to take control of those that are being discriminated against. Freire (1970) talks about the oppressor and those being oppressed. He touches on the definition of the oppressed and the oppressor by examining power roles and the effects of being in the role of an oppressor and oppressed. Freire examines oppression, both the oppressor and the oppressed as a form of dehumanization. He states: “The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization” (p. 48). Thus, it is inhumane for humans to behave otherwise. Humans must work together to create a socially just world, where everyone is respected and acknowledged.

The students saw racism of marginalized groups as discrimination and a method for keeping people separated. One example was the concept of the border as the students compared the border between Mexico and the United States to the separation of African Americans from Whites during the civil rights movement. While police during the civil rights movement brutally sprayed water from water hoses against African Americans, Latinx communities are threatened by ICE and border patrol. Children saw police brutality against marginalized groups reflecting the same actions of those police officers in the 1960s.

Paula brought this up during a literature discussion in the middle of January, where she discussed how *The Journey* and *Dreamers* reminded her about the movie *The Hate U Give*, based on the book by Angie Thomas. In the graffiti board discussion, Paula wrote: “I think that all people should have freedom” and “the book reminds me of *The Hate You Give*. And this should stop. I just hate it”. Paula had compared the similar experiences of the characters of those books as an act of racism towards African Americans in the movie *The Hate U Give* (see Figure 3.12). She perceived using the border wall to separate Hispanics and Latinx from the United States as racism.

During that discussion, students saw the news, where Donald Trump spoke negatively about Mexicans and immigrants coming from Mexico. His constant remarks at his rallies cried over and over, “build the wall!” Students were invested in the conversation, especially since most have family who came from Mexico to live in the United States. In this case, Paula’s family had come from El Salvador and building a wall meant separating families but also caging a group of people because of who they are, based on ethnicity and skin color.

As noted earlier, Lupita talked about the treatment of people on the border between Mexico and the United States. She wrote: “It’s like dogs” as she tried to explain her feelings and

thoughts during the literature discussion on *The Journey and Dreamers*. In Figure 3.22, Lupita writes on the graffiti board that “Mexicans are like pitbulls and the white people are regular dogs”. It was hard to understand Lupita’s comment in the literature discussion and hard to interpret the graffiti board.

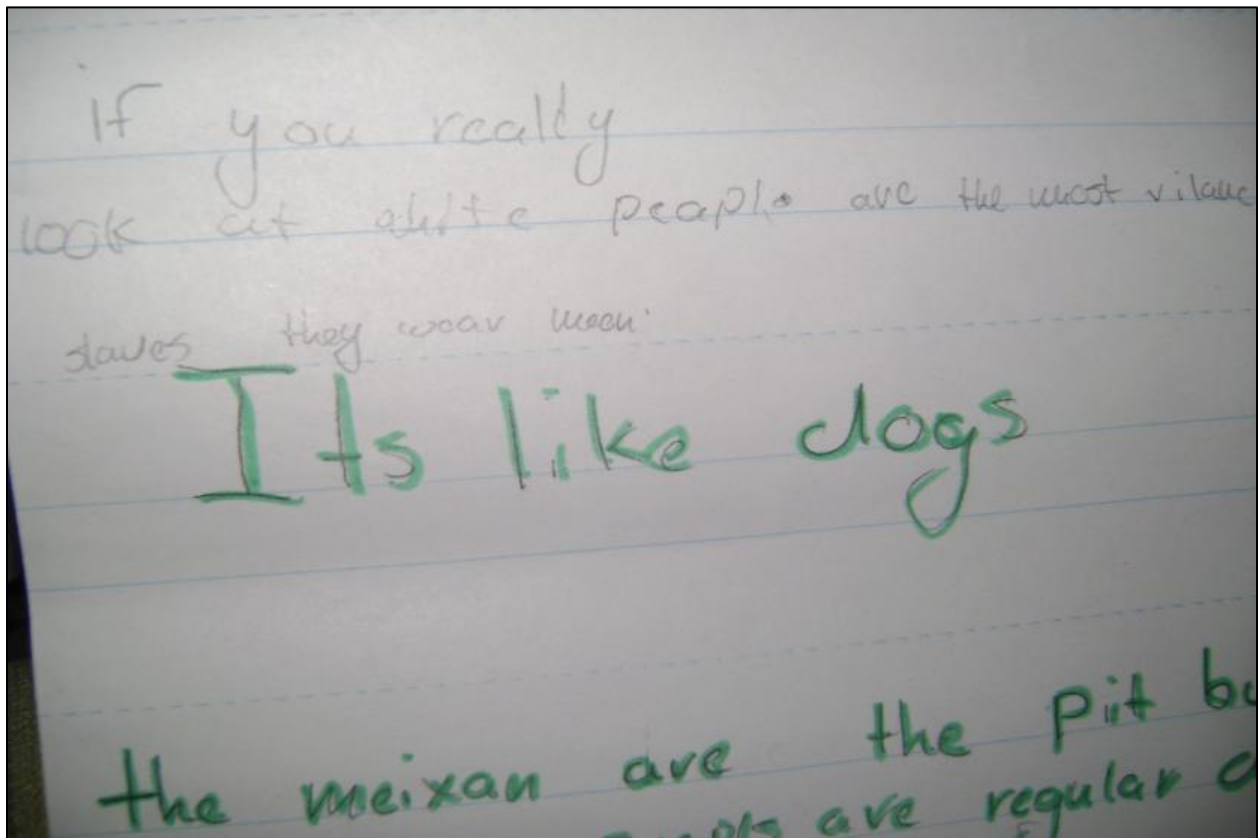


Figure 3.22. Lupita’s Graffiti Board Response in January

Lupita’s comparison to dogs can be interpreted as a reference to racism. For instance, she talks about pit bulls being aggressive, mean, and scary. When she compares Mexicans to pitbulls she makes it clear that some people view Mexicans as aggressive, scary, and mean, while a regular dog may mean good or neutral behavior. Hence, the mean scary dogs need to be put in a cage. For Lupita, the border along Mexico and the United States is a cage for Mexicans and Latinx people. The border keeps them caged in and away from the United States. In my teacher

journal notes I recorded Lupita's comment: "if the pitbulls are free, the regular dogs may be in trouble." Which reminded me of comments often heard: "Mexicans take our jobs" or "they bring in drugs".

In the audio recording, Lupita made it clear that she does not view anyone as a dog but was using this example as a "metaphor" in the best way she thought possible to share what she was really thinking (refer to the transcript under the theme Borders, Subthemes II). Being concise, what Lupita was trying to say was that racism still exists and the act of othering and pushing others away based on skin color or ethnic background is very much in existence in the United States.

This powerful discussion is a result of what Freire (1970) terms problem-posing education. Freire states, "In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83.) Lupita, and Paula resonate with the issue of racism as they reflect on the oppressed and the oppressors, bringing in their own experiences as the oppressed, towards a more humanistic transformation where they were able to discuss and re-transform their view of the world, while at the same time proposing change. In other words, this discussion is not a critique against people, instead, it is a conversation to understand how racism against marginalized groups works, in order to critically think about their world and propose change. For Paula to say, "This should stop. And I just hate it" and Lupita to say, "Take a stand everybody should have freedom!" means just how much the girls are critically thinking about the injustices they perceive around them as Latinas and their belief this kind of oppression should stop (see Figure 3.23)



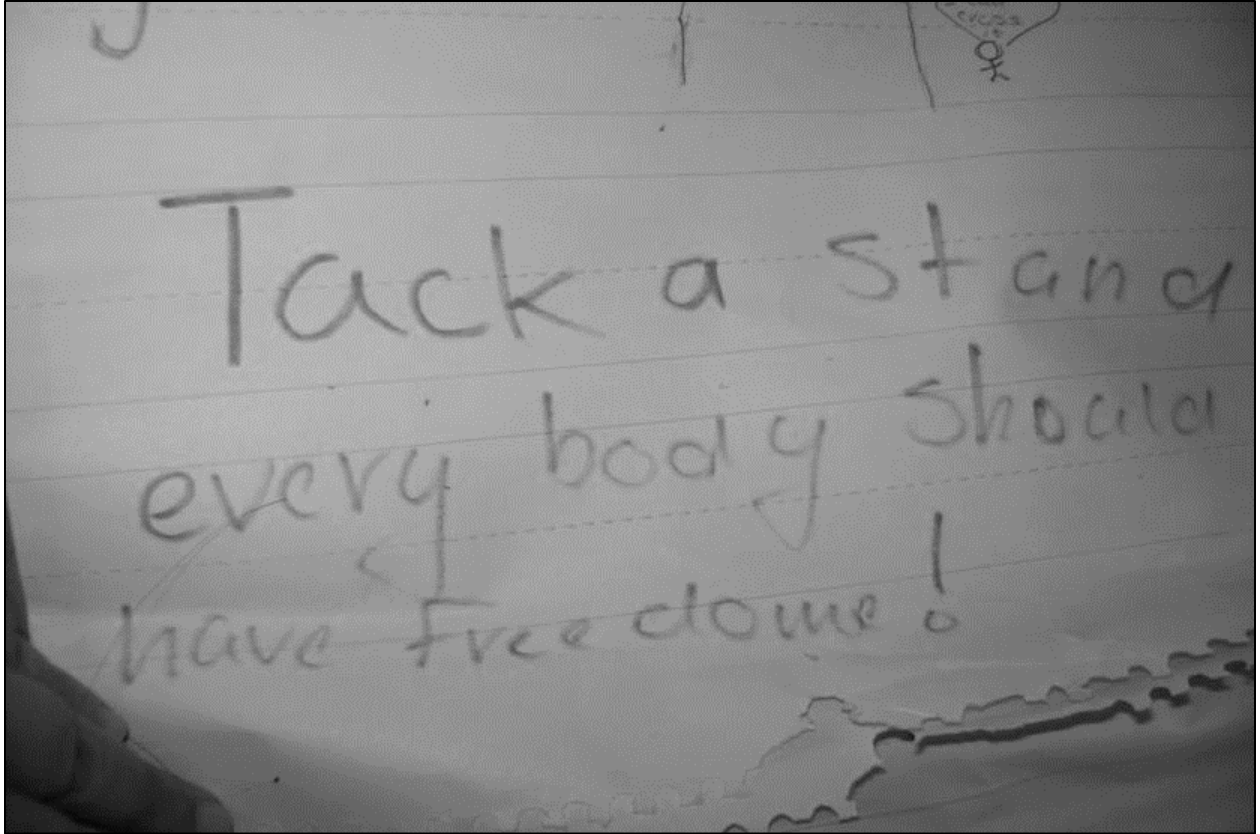


Figure 3.23. Lupita's graffiti board response in January ["Take a stand everybody should have freedom!" in the graffiti board].

For Lupita and Paula, the border wall was not just a means to separate families, but also to separate people of color, in this case Latinx and Mexicans from others already living in the United States. Like Lupita, the wall became a cage to keep away Mexicans, Latinx, and immigrants.

Another example of discrimination based on race or ethnicity was evident in Lili's responses. For example, Lili wrote something in her section of a chart where she referenced racism and the civil rights movement. She connected the border and the issues many Latinx and Mexicans face while attempting to come into the United States or already living in the United States as similar to the experiences of African Americans long before during the 1960s.

In the discussion, Lili said she thought that racism was done with already. But that she sees the same thing happening again when hearing the news, reading books, and listening to her peers. She said to me that she had known that Black people had separate bathrooms, restaurants, and theatres, but never in a million years she would have thought that to this day we still separate people today would be separated based on who they are. Figure 3.24 indicates her thinking.

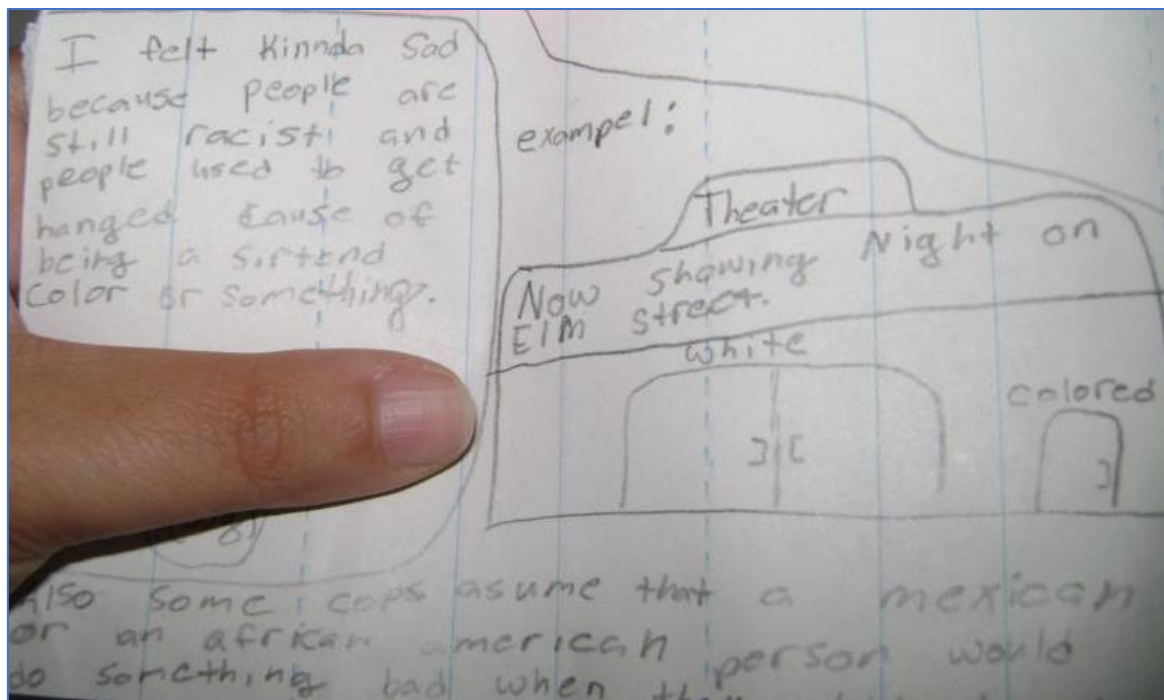


Figure 3.24. Lili's graffiti board response in January.

In her section of the graffiti board, Lili writes: "Also some cops assume that a Mexican or an African American person would do something bad when the person isn't really doing anything wrong". Students had brought up the police brutality against African Americans from the news. In my teacher reflection journal I wrote:

*The students are comparing the events happening today with police brutality as a mirror to the events that happened back in the civil rights movement. Lili said: "It's the same thing, it may look different because it is a different time period but hate and the injustice against people who are colored is the same." Paula talked about the movie The Hate You Give and shared how much the hate shown against Hispanics reminds her about the hate many Africans Americans face today and faced back in the day. Lupita talks about*

*Hispanics and Mexicans a little closely and shares that even Mexicans get pulled over and some are sent back to Mexico even if they are U.S. citizens.*

In Figure 3.24, Lili drew a theatre and wrote: “Now Showing: Night on Elm Street” and at the bottom are two doors, one labeled “white” and the other “colored”. She wrote to the side of the image: “I felt kinda sad because people are still racist, and people used to get hanged ‘cause of being a certain color or something.” Students in these examples believe that racism against marginalized groups in the United States still plays a big role in their lives and the world around them. In the news, children saw cops shoot African Americans, believing that they had a weapon when they really didn’t, and Mexicans getting pulled over by a police officers without a probable cause.

### **Racism Leads to Injustice and Violence**

For many Mexicans and Latinx communities, racism is echoed through the brutality of police and the border patrol and the neglect of schools not integrating a culturally diverse curriculum that values the students’ cultural backgrounds.

For students, racism is ugly and violent and unjust. Through the analysis of the data, images of guns and killing appeared from 6 different students. In many of the images there were stick men (some wearing hats), holding a gun and killing other stick figures that had no weapons. Many used x’s to cross out the eyes to illustrate the stick figures as dead. One such image is Figure 3.25, where there are 4 stick figures illustrated. In addition, there is a line that separates two stick figures from the other two. The image is collected from a sketch to stretch activity done in February around *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*.

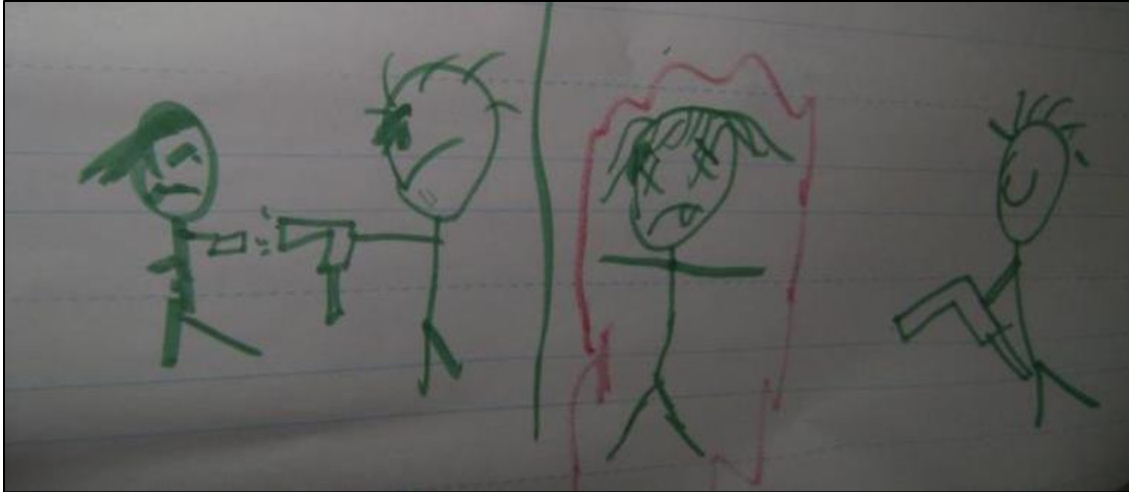


Figure 3.25 Joel's Sketch to Stretch.

In the image, violence and hatred are seen as two figures illustrated as dead. There is a line in between that may depict a border or can depict two different examples of violence. The image on the right with two stick figure men shows what looks to be a younger man holding a paper wearing his hat backwards and being shot, possibly an identification paper. The man with the gun could be a police officer or the border patrol, but the man is shot before giving the other stick figure the paper.

On the other side of the image, the woman is shot and killed. She is the only one with red markings circling around her, which can be interpreted as blood. The image chillingly shows the killer holding the gun with a smile on his face. The image illustrates the man enjoying the fact that she is dead which is disturbing. Why does he have a smile? Is it because he killed her? Did he kill her because of who she is? Her skin color?

Another image collected from a sketch to stretch activity with *The Journey and Dreamers* shows a similar portrayal of violence against others. In the image two stick figures are holding guns, but one of the stick figures smiles and holds two guns, whereas the other only holds one. Above the image, the word "crazy" is written with an arrow pointing to the figure. The other

figure looks worried and does not have a smile on the face, but holds a straight face. (Figure 3.26)

Interpreting the image, the two figures seem to be at a disagreement or may be pointing the weapons at each other because they are different from one another. The figure with the word “Crazy” pointing to him, gives a chilling feeling that this person enjoys killing and hurting others, based on his smile and the fact that he is holding two weapons. The other figure seems scared and holds the weapon in self-defense. When looking closely at the image, however, a knife is seen in the middle of the figure with the two weapons, it is not clear if he is wounded, if the knife was in motion as it stabs the figure, or if the figure is holding the knife around his waist within a pocket.

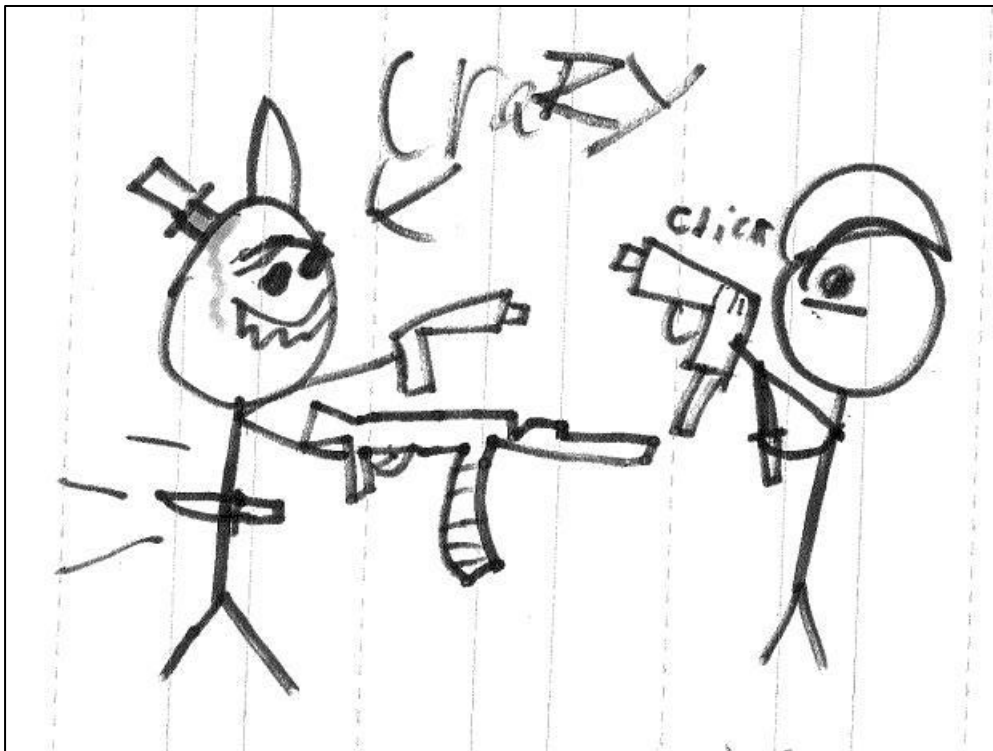


Figure 3.26. Adán's Sketch to Stretch on *Dreamers* and *The Journey*

On the back side of the paper, another similar image is drawn. This time, one of the figures does not hold a weapon or gun at all. In this image (Figure 3.27) the stick figure on the

right holds a gun against the face of another stick figure. The stick figure seems to be shouting “no” and above his head, are the words, “not crazy”, pointing towards him. The figure on the right seems to be holding a gun and looks angry. During the discussion on these books, students found it valuable to talk about the actions people take as racist. The group consisted of boys and the majority shared in their groups about the acts of violence people take to destroy a race or dehumanize someone.

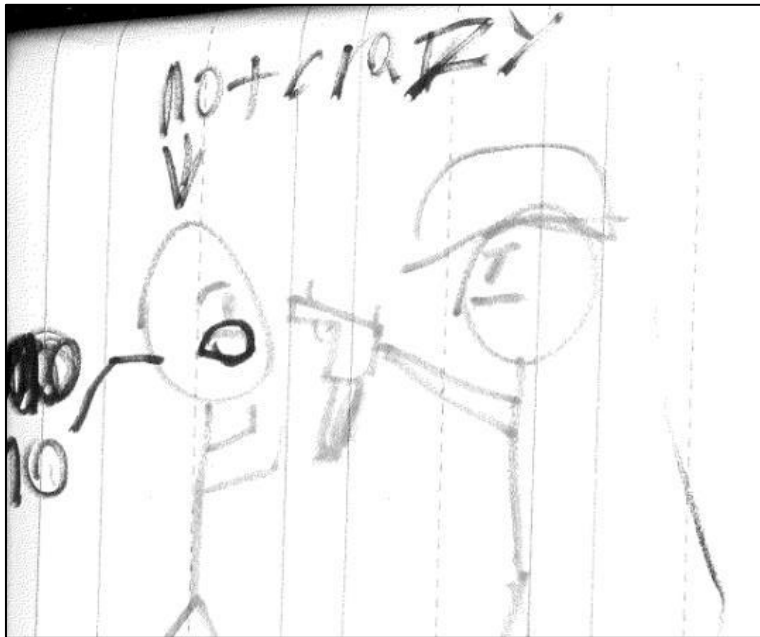


Figure 3.27. Joel's Sketch to Stretch on *Dremers* and *The Journey*

For students, racism played a factor in creating a wall and played a role in allowing the oppressor the power to continue to oppress those who do not hold any power. From the words of Donald Trump to “send them back!” and “build a wall” to the discussions and conversations of students, it seems that racism hasn’t gone away. The experiences lived by African Americans back in the 1960s compares to the lives of Latinx people living in the United States today. As long as there is police brutality and judgements of people based on the color of their skin, the students believed that nothing really has changed.

Literature discussions offered students pathways to think critically about the issue of racism. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017) state:

*As we think about teaching and teachers, we ask: What would our pedagogies look like if this gaze (and the kindred patriarchal, cisheteronormative, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, Judeo-Christian gazes) weren't the dominant one? What would liberating ourselves from this gaze and the educational expectations it forwards mean for our abilities to envision new and recover community rooted forms of teaching and learning? What if the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle class norms, but rather was to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their cultural practices and investments? (p. 3)*

Students are not critiquing the United States nor are they othering or “pointing fingers” at a group of people. Instead, they are sharing that they know and understand the struggles many people of color face today and how similar those struggles relate to the struggles many faced in U.S. history, such as in the civil rights movement. Living within a marginalized community, students know what it is like to be a part of that struggle but strive for hope in a better future and world for everyone.

### **Identity and Language Struggles for Latinx Peoples in The United States**

While racism is an external struggle many Latinx communities struggle with identity and language. The struggle in this case is not only external, but internal to maintain the identity and language inherited prior to being in the United States while at the same creating a new identity. Many Latinx people come from Spanish-speaking communities and a different culture, and, living in the United States, there is an expectation to speak English and acquire the “American culture.” For those already living in the United States but come from a Latinx background, the struggle is to maintain their heritage languages and cultures along with acquiring the culture and language in the U.S.

Hence, Latinx communities are aware that there is a constant struggle to develop a bicultural identity, instead of losing their Latinx identity. on the identities acquired before and the ones being developed by living in the United States. For Latinx students in the United States, specifically the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in this classroom, having two cultures and languages is a struggle as much as it is a blessing.

In this theme students, focused on their struggles with a bicultural identity. In addition, there is also be a short section on gender identity as one student powerfully thought about her identity through a critical lens. Furthermore, language is also be explored in this section because identity and language went hand in hand for these students.

For students, identity was something that evolved over the year as did language. In most of the books, there were characters who spoke English and Spanish or maybe just one language and students found connections to those experiences. In Figure 3.28 a web mapping out this theme shows two subthemes that are explored. The first subtheme is related to the discussion students had about what defines someone as Latinx and what defined someone as American, while the second subtheme explores forced identities imposed on Latinx peoples living in the United States.



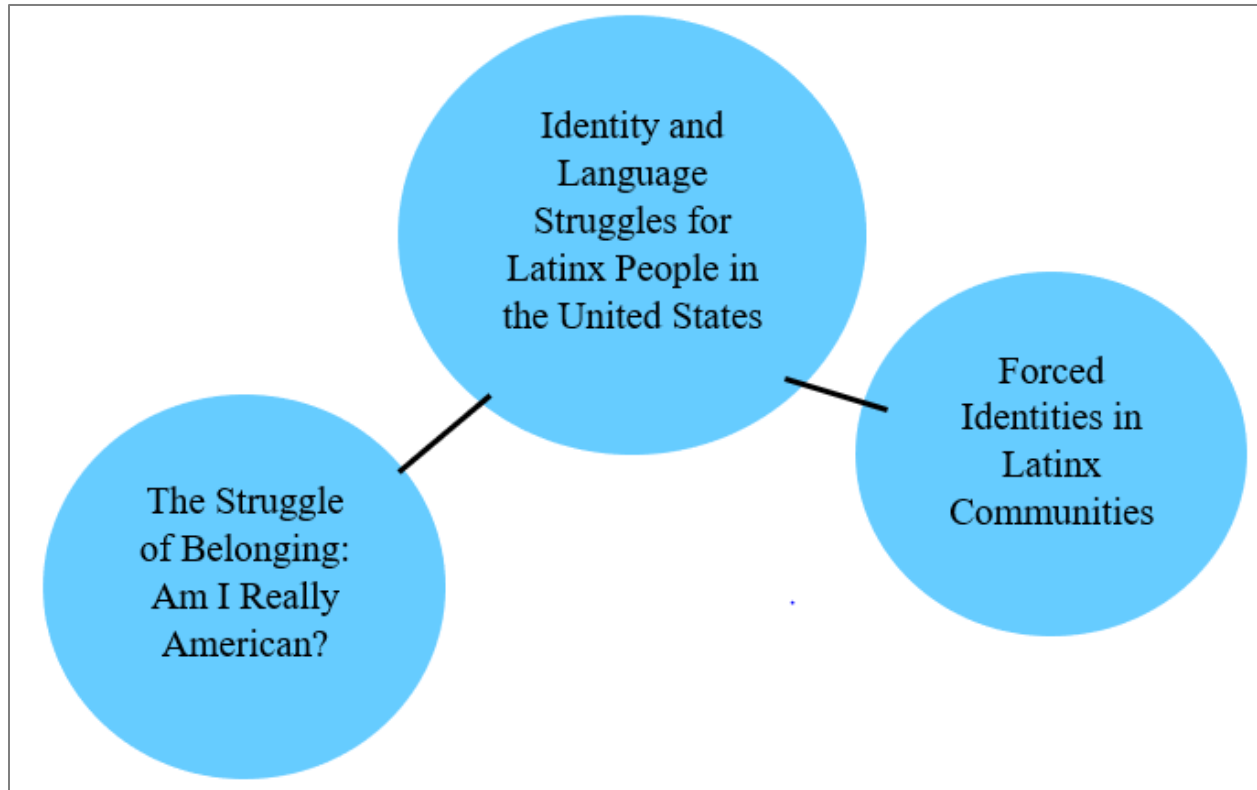


Figure 3.28. Web of the theme Identity and Language Struggles for Latinx in the U.S

In the next section, students share their reflections and ideas about language and identity as Latinx children living in the United States thinking about the struggles that come along with their lives. Student examples are explored closely through sketch to stretch artifacts, graffiti boards, audio recordings and more.

### **The Struggle of Belonging: Am I Really American?**

The books that students explored many weeks after discussing the border and immigration invited them to explore identity and language of Latinx communities coming into the United States or already living in the United States.

In *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown, the main character Marisol comes from a mixed-race family. She looks different because she has brown skin and red hair. To Marisol's peers, she doesn't match. Her clothes and lunch such as peanut butter and jelly burritos illustrate some of the ways she does not match. She has two cultures and identities which come from her parents, since her mother is Peruvian and her father is American. She appreciates who she is and students saw the value of that as well. In Figure 3.29 Genesis drew a picture of Marisol McDonald in the graffiti board.



Figure 3.29. Genesis' drawing of Marisol McDonald in a graffiti board.

When I asked Genesis to share her drawing of Marisol, I asked why she had chosen to just draw Marisol. Genesis stated that she drew her because she liked that she was true to herself.

In my teacher reflection journal, I noted:

*Genesis drew a picture of Marisol. I asked her: "Why did you draw her?" She said: "Marisol struggled with who she was. People were bullying her because she didn't match. But there is nothing wrong with that. It is who she is. It made me sad that she was trying to change herself and that people would tell her to do that. It reminded me because people tell me that too." Then she said: "Marisol had a hard time and people made it*

*hard for her just like they have done that to me, but that is who I am and it is okay to be different”.*

Although Genesis pointed out the struggle that Marisol faced in the book through the peer pressure to “match,” she focused on the positive of being different. At the same time, Genesis understood the struggle that Marisol faced because she said that she too had people make it “hard for her,” although she didn’t go deeply into what that was. In this example, Genesis, a Mexican American student, understands what it is like to be Mexican and American and the struggle that comes with having two cultures and languages and in this case, two parents from different ethnic backgrounds for Marisol.

Joel engaged in the literature discussion also found value in illustrating Marisol. Joel valued Marisol’s identity as a Peruvian American. In Figure 3.30, he illustrates Marisol by drawing her, although the image was not completed, Joel used vibrant colors to illustrate Marisol’s vibrant personality.



Figure 3.30. Joel’s drawing of Marisol in a graffiti board.

Students found value in Marisol not matching, but they also connected with the struggle that Marisol faced. For instance, in one conversation I noted in my teacher journal students talking about that struggle, this was recorded the second week of February 2019.

*Today Santiago said: "It's hard you know. Am I really Mexican? Or Am I really American?" The students in the group looked around as if to find the answer. All of the students related to this, even I. "Like we speak Spanish at home, but sometimes if I say something wrong, I am laughed at. Same at school, like I talk English, but if I don't speak it well like I'm too Mexican" he added. His comment reminded me of my own personal experience. Here I am as a Latina teacher, teaching students English instruction only, and yet, my native language is pushed aside, all of our native languages are. English is required to speak in the United States. It's like your divided, like there is an internal border separating your "Mexican side" from your "American Side". Can't I just be both?*

The discussions of students were powerful. They argued that there is beauty in appreciating both cultures, languages, and identities, but there is also division in doing so, because of the expectations of society to be one or the other. Santiago's question really resounded with all of us Latinx in the classroom as we live in the United States, are we really American? Are we really Mexican? Can we be both?

In another group discussion around *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* the boys talked about Marisol not matching and how Marisol felt about that.

**Alberto:** I thought Marisol McDonald was about her not matching her clothes or anything like that part like when she dresses...where was it [looks through the book]

**Eduardo:** Yeah, like it was her...

**Alberto:** Um [pointing at the book] she has green polka dots, and a red shirt, purple stipes and a yellow hat, and she thinks she match

**Eduardo:** But her brother...

**Alberto:** But her brother did not like the way she dress and say that didn't match

**Eduardo:** And she really love it the way that she was dressed, and she didn't care what her brother said to her

**Alberto:** And this book is weird because she even says write your name normal and she is but...

**Romero:** How do we know about the story if we can't remember....what is this

**Alberto:** put it close to you [handing Romero the audio recorder]

**Romero:** So, I am guessing that the McDonald Book is talking about how she never matches clothes, her hair doesn't match, but and her friends tells her to match

**Alberto:** Her friends hate

**Romero:** Her friends tell her to match and well um one day she um, she what's it called, um she decided to match because the teacher said she didn't match and the students said that she didn't match so one day she came to school and she was dressed like she did match and matched...here you go

In the conversation the boys are paying attention to Marisol changing who she is because the "brother didn't think she matched" and "her teacher and friends too." Eduardo appreciates that Marisol didn't care and that she loves to wear what she wants no matter the brother's or other's opinions are. Romero, on the other hand, points out the fact that people didn't like how Marisol didn't match and so one day she decides to do that, although he never adds to the discussion how the text ended or extends his thinking. However, after the discussion ended, Romero did inform me how much it struck him that Marisol went to the extreme to change who she really was. The book connected with him, due to the issue. Students are constantly pressured to "fit in" and when the layer of "fitting in" adds to identity, culture, and language, this can become a struggle.

Language also plays a crucial component into the identities that Latinx communities in the United States. Not only are Latinx communities expected to speak their native language, living in the United States also requires them to speak English, especially in Structured English Immersion classrooms like ours's, where students are to acquire academic English. So, these discussions about questioning their identities was an opportunity for students to think about who they are and who others perceive them to be. Kris D. Gutiérrez and Patrick Johnson (2017) state:

*The culturally mediated world that youth inhabit is constantly changing and forces them to craft their identities from seemingly disparate parts. But as an extension of this understanding, while young people are already practicing holding multiple texts and ideas simultaneously, we could do a better job of acknowledging how they also hold multiple feelings about the cultures in which they participate. (p. 257)*

There is value in students having conversations about who they are and who others expect them to be. The students' discussions around Marisol echo the importance of staying true to your identity and that struggles will arise. For students their identities are defined by language, ethnicity, and likes and dislikes. Students are also aware that sometimes the identities we may have as Latinx people in the United States may be challenged and may serve as a dividing line between two languages and cultures.

*Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal points out that names are also part of the identity of a person. The students loved talking about their names. They enjoyed sharing the inspiration behind each of their names and how some of their names were derived from past family members or ancestors. Lupita shared that she was named after her grandmother, whereas Ally had her mother's name and called herself a junior.

In the book, Alma is trying to find out the meanings behind her really long name, which many Latinx children can relate to. Lupita holds two names, her first name and middle name along with two last names, one from her mother one from her father. In the discussions, students found Alma's journey beautiful and interesting and many drew Alma on their graffiti boards to illustrate how much they valued Alma and her journey in discovering more about herself. In Figure 3.31, collected in February during the literature discussion around *Alma and How She Got Her Name*, Juan found it very valuable to draw a picture of Alma.



Figure 3.31. Joel's drawing of *Alma and How She Got Her Name* on the graffiti board

Joel explained that Alma was important to him because of her interest in finding out the meaning of her name. Joel expressed his struggle even with his name as it is longer than most names. "I have my mother's last name and my dad's" he said. "I know what it is like when people like criticize you for that." He pointed that names are an important part of who you are and that he likes his name just like Alma likes her name.

Students also talked about the struggle of people mispronouncing Spanish names. Students shared, for example, how sometimes "José" may be read as "ho-zay" and that makes students feel uncomfortable. I also commented during this short discussion that people try to shorten my name to "Angie" instead of calling me by my full name, Angélica.

In the same literature discussion group, on the graffiti board, Juan drew a small picture of Alma with her name written big. This can be interpreted as giving value to the Spanish name. In Figure 3.32, Juan values Alma and her name as it is illustrated in the graffiti board (see Figure. 3.32).



Figure 3.32. Juan's response to *Alma and How She Got Her Name* in the graffiti board

Students valued Alma and saw her appreciation for her name as a reminder for them to appreciate their names they also have. As mentioned, students had struggles in school or in the United States with their names and with their home languages and identities. Students are given English-only classes and teachers mispronounce their names or shorten them. So, the fact that the students were able to discuss these things and explore their own identities and reflect on books holding a similar experience, allowed them to find value in themselves and see themselves a little differently.

The boys who discussed the book *Marisol McDonald* also discussed the book *Alma*. In their discussion the boys talk about Alma and collect her name to her family:

**Alberto:** her name is Alma? Is that right

**Eduardo:** Alma

[long pause] Alma...I can't really pronounce it. Alma has a very long name of because of um

**Alberto:** because of um her family story and like yeah and she kinda doesn't like it cuz it's too long and stuff and yeah. who wants to go next? You want to go next? Or you?



Alberto pointed to Alma who initially did not like her name because it was too long. Although he doesn't continue to share his ideas or reflections, he points out that she didn't like her name. Which is something that many Latinx students in the United States may also experience, especially in a dominant English classroom. As the conversation continued, Eduardo shared that Alma loved nature and plants and her family and soon Alberto shared:

**Alberto:** Wait, wait, can I say something really quick. Alma likes her family and she wants to learn about it, her family

**Romero:** Alma she, she likes her family of course, she loves her family

Alberto pointed out that Alma likes her family and wants to learn about her family. When interpreting this conversation, I felt Alberto was saying that although Alma does not like her name, she knows her name is important because it comes from her family history and allows her to be who she is. Alberto understands that there are struggles with Latinx names for Latinx students but understands as he reflected back to the book that a name is part of family history and a person's identity.

During the discussion Valentín who was in another group stopped by and was interested in learning about the story. The boys talked about losing family members and the relationship with the names that Alma receives. It's interesting how Valentín came to join the group to talk about Alma and the book. He showed interest and engagement with the issue of having long names as he too has a long name. It was as if Valentín sought support from Alma to face his own struggles with his name and identity. Students know that family, names, and the language depicted make Alma who she is, and this resonates with the students as they too think about who they are.

One last example in this subtheme is the struggle that many Latinx students face when it comes to language. In the discussion around *Pepita Talks Twice* by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman,

students understood Pepita's struggle. In the book, the main character Pepita is tired of speaking twice, everything she says in English must be translated to Spanish and vice versa. Her native language is Spanish, but since that she is living in the U.S. and everyone is speaking English, Pepita makes the decision to not speak Spanish anymore. It isn't until one day her dog *lobo* is fetching a toy in the street and a car comes, that Pepita, struggling to call for lobo in English, finally realizes the importance of speaking in Spanish.

Interested in what students would discuss, I sat with the students to listen in on their conversation. They asked me to participate in the conversation and share my own experiences as a Latina and listen to theirs. Further into the discussion I found myself asking a question:

**Ms. Serrano:** Here's my question, do you speak Spanish when you go home

**Lili:** a little bit

**María:** Yes sometimes

**Ms. Serrano:** Yes sometimes. What do you say in Spanish María?

**María:** I don't really say anything that much in Spanish

María was someone who I really wanted to get to know. I knew that her parents spoke Spanish but had no idea that she had not acquired the language. In my probing I attempted to get to know them and see where they stand in speaking Spanish. It was interesting that both María and Lili spoke a little bit of Spanish. In the classroom, however, I never heard the girls speak Spanish and I wasn't sure if Spanish was their native language or their second language. Where the girls prohibited to speak Spanish at home or at school? Where they embarrassed to speak Spanish? Did they lose their language along the way? Did their parents just teach them English so that they won't "struggle" in school? Of course, these assumptions cannot be made. But, it just made me wonder how Latinas growing up in predominantly Spanish-speaking homes, speak

very little Spanish and what happened along the way. I attempted to get to know the students more and asked:

**Ms. Serrano:** Who do you talk to in Spanish when you get home?

**Lili** [laughs]

**Ms. Serrano:** Why are you laughing? [silence] What about you [ask Juan] who do you talk to?

**Juan:** To everybody in Spanish

**Ms. Serrano:** Does your step-dad speak Spanish?

**Juan:** Yes

[minutes later into the discussion]

**Ms. Serrano:** What about you? [to Lilly]

**Lili:** mmm...I'm not gonna say, I'm not gonna say?

*Silence*

The fact that Lili did not want to share whom she spoke Spanish to surprised me. She had been so open and now this was private. I didn't attempt to ask why, nor did I want to push her to explain. Could it be the notion of the oppressor and the oppressed that Paulo Freire (1970) talks about? Was she afraid that I would do something if she spoke about it? Did her not sharing have to do with my presence and my role as the educator? This excerpt reminded me of the struggle of being both a Spanish speaker and an English speaker. English is only spoken at school and must be spoken well. I often remember my teachers asking me to perfect my English and how my English had to be so good that people would assume I was an English speaker. My mother would enforce my native language at home as I began gaining an English accent, while attempting to speak Spanish. I wondered if these were the same struggles students faced. It was then we continued to talk and I asked: Why don't you speak Spanish at school? The students were quiet and no one answered. It allowed me time to reflect. Was it my role as the educator? Or was it the

fact that I, as a Latina, was teaching an English-only class to Latinx students, where Spanish is prohibited. The discussion continued:

**Ms. Serrano:** What did you think about her not wanting to speak Spanish?

**Joel:** It's because Pepita doesn't want to talk twice

**Ms. Serrano:** Why?

**Joel:** she gets sad

**Lili:** sad and mad

**Joel:** yeah

**Ms. Serrano:** should we only speak English?

**Joel:** No

**Lili:** No

**Ms. Serrano:** Why?

**Lili:** Cuz there's people who actually just speak Spanish

**Joel:** They say America is a free state

**Ms. Serrano:** Free country

**Joel:** yeah

**Lili:** But it's not ever since Trump became president

[María is quiet]

**Lili:** Ms. Trump is literally an orange

Interestingly, President Trump came into the conversation when the question was asked if we should only speak English. Lili and Juan were both comparing that question to the fact that, "America" should be free, as if they knew internally that this wasn't a question but a proposal and something real that they could relate to Donald Trump. Later in the discussion, I shared my personal experience. I noted this in my teacher reflection journal:

*Here I took time to share about a gentlemen who walked into our school and made a comment about our school doing the pledge in Spanish, since we are a DUAL language*

*school, which means we implement bilingual education. He had stated: This is America, speak English. I asked what the students thought about this and Lilly said:*

**Lili:** *Forget that fu!*

**Joel:** *Yeah if I were a dog he would have a purple eye and bloody nose...*

Lili said to forget the man that made that comment, as if to say to ignore it. Whereas Joel made a more violent comment. In both cases however, although there is a struggle for Latinx communities to speak in their native tongue in schools or even in the United States because of comments like the one I shared with the students, The students still find hope and value in speaking Spanish. I also wrote in my journal:

*We still have Donald Trump being brought up and students are beginning to think about how that role affects who they are and what language they can speak. We didn't get to finish this conversation, but I wonder if we had more time, what the students would have said. (week 12, page 5)*

In a student written reflection on *Pepita Talks Twice*, Valentin wrote that speaking two times must be tiring to do and he understands Pepita's frustration. (Figure 3.33)

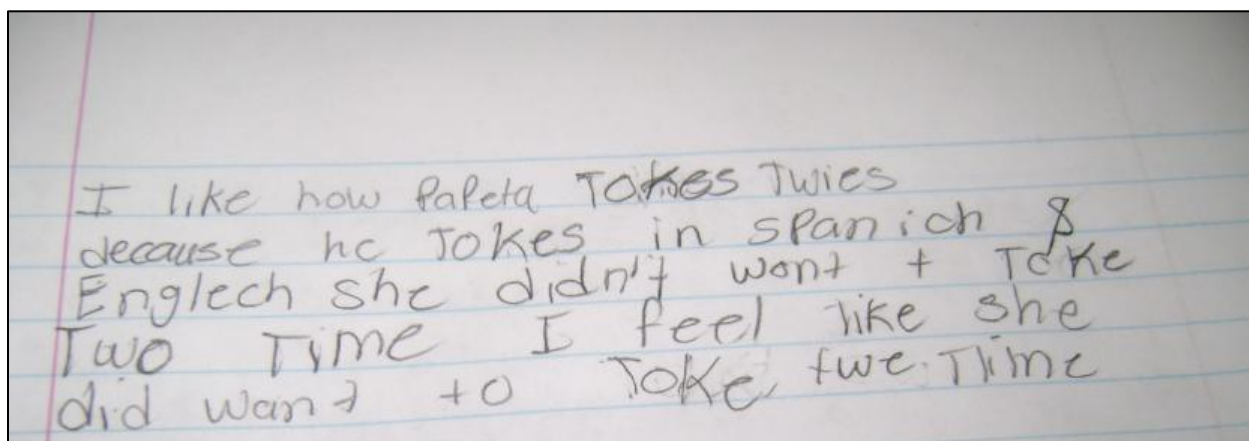


Figure 3.33. Valentín's written response to *Pepita Talks Twice*

Valentín in this written reflection shares his empathy for Pepita although he liked the book, Valentín repeats that Pepita does not want to talk twice as if to say: "leave her alone". A

lot of students empathized because they too often speak twice, becoming translators for their parents who may not know English. So that frustration and struggle is evident. Latinx students find it difficult to have two languages sometimes because of the expectation to do well in both languages and be able to communicate to two different language speakers.

María had not shared much about the book in the discussion, but, in her written response, she goes deep into her reflection of the book. She wrote: “I would want to learn more Spanish because I know a lot of English”. She explained that she liked the book because “it is a Mexican book” and finds value in sharing something she can relate to. Before, María had mentioned she didn’t speak a lot of Spanish at home, she was restating it here, but then adding, that she wants to learn more Spanish. I asked her about this written response, and she said: “You could speak to your family if you know more Spanish and it is important because you could get a good job my mom says. I want to learn more Spanish.” María’s struggle was not knowing her native language. That is something that many Latinx communities in the United States face. They face losing their first language, and because of that, losing connections to their families (see Figure 3.34)

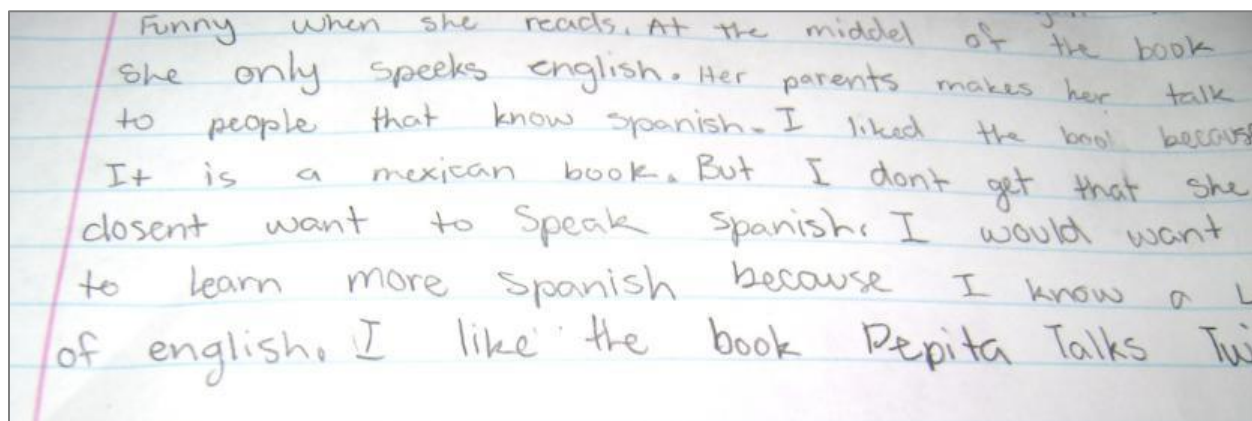


Figure 3.34. María’s response to *Pepita Talks Twice*

Language was revisited again in *Drawn Together* by Minh Le. For María, learning Spanish would mean she could communicate with her family. In *Drawn Together*, an experience

with a grandson and his grandfather is explored around language. This is not a Latinx book, yet it does beautifully portray many obstacles that many Latinx face today: communicating with elders without knowing their heritage language. Many Latinx come to the United States and over the years acquire English and lose their first language in the process. In this book, a grandson who only speaks English is alone with his grandfather who only speaks Chinese and struggles to even communicate with him. Not only is the language different as illustrated in the book, but so is the food and the type of entertainment both engage with. When the two want to communicate with each other they find it hard to do so. It is only through art that the grandson and his grandfather can communicate with each other.

For students this situation was both funny and creative. They found it funny because they could relate to similar experiences as one student shared with me through a small group discussion. For others, this can be a creative way to communicate as Lili had pointed out. Here is an excerpt of one conversation about the book and other books that they also read regarding language such as, *I love Saturdays y Domingos* and *A Different Pond*:

**Lili:** [laughs] This book is about Old School Versus New School

**Me:** What do you mean?

**Lili:** It's retro, old but cool

**Ally:** It's about like...

**Lili:** Alice I was talking ...

**Ally\:** It's not Alice it's Ally

**Lili:** And you call me what's it ma-call it... It's about old school versus new school, the little boy draws the new school and the grandpa um draws old school and like the old school is better because there is more [inaudible]

Lili is talking about how different the grandfather and grandson were based on age. The students found that relatable and not necessarily a struggle. Lili's last comment before the audio goes off dives into the issue around language.

**Lili:** Yeah, and then the books were really cool I mean, the um *Drawn Together* book reminds me and my mom, but I mean she's not that old but, um, (coughs) actually this reminds me and my, me and my nana, like great, great, great nana because me and her used to like I didn't know what she was saying, because she used to talk um Spanish all the time, and I didn't know what she was saying and um me and her used to hang all the time, I used to draw pictures for her and she used to draw pictures for me, but...

What was important in this excerpt from Lili is that she had a similar experience with her great nana, who only spoke Spanish whereas she didn't. She too used pictures to try to communicate. The struggle is not knowing two languages, but not knowing your home language, your heritage language, which makes it hard to communicate with family.

It is important to note that not everyone in the classroom was bilingual. For instance, Ally and Aren who are White and monolingual English speakers found it difficult to laugh at the same things as their Latinx peers. In the book *Drawn Together* the grandfather and grandson have a difficult time talking to each other because the grandson only speaks English while the grandfather only spoke Chinese. Latinx students could relate to this language barrier that they too have had speaking with their relatives, but Ally and Aren could not. Ally and Aren had never had to speak another language from their family members. In my teacher reflection journal, I noted that Ally didn't understand what was so funny. Her peers found it funny because they know how language plays a role in not understanding the other to communicate and how some of them had used that to trick their family members, while Ally had never had this experience.

Students engaged with the books and thought about language and how communication works in their discussions. In other groups who visited these books, found it very creative and engaging to have language as a tool that connects family together. In one of the graffiti boards



Alberto illustrated that he loved the book *Saturdays y Domingos* because the child was able to visit both sets of grandparents. He found the value of having two languages and the struggle it may be because you can't choose between your family, you love them both. In many of the books, students echoed the importance and the struggles having two identities and languages can be for Latinx in the United States, because you must be both Latinx and "American." Sometimes balancing the two or others' views about who you are can be difficult to deal with.

### **Forced Identities in Latinx Communities**

For many Latinx communities, identity comes from a label. Latinx communities in the United States often struggle with being labeled by stereotypes. Even with gender identity, Latinx communities are held to heteronormous expectations; girls wear pink and boys wear blue, and it is assumed that is the identity one must attend to. Interestingly, students found that another label can also affect identity in the U.S. That label comes from the government for undocumented immigrants who are often referred to as an alien. The term was new to students and at the same time, it was odd. Why would a human being be referred to as an alien? Students were puzzled because that term meant creatures from outer space to them.

In this theme, the term alien is explored closely as students engaged with conversations around immigration and residency status. This subtheme explores gender identity as students critically discussed the notion of boy and girl.

For these 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade Latinx students, labels were hard. They were just discovering who they were. Students found that labels were ways to place someone in a box. Lili struggled with this the most in regard to her gender identity. At the beginning of the year, when Lili came to the class, her peers questioned if she was a boy or a girl based on what she was wearing. The students noticed she dressed like a boy, but she didn't identify as a boy.

When I had a conversation with her back in August, Lili had told me that she identified herself as queer. The conversation came about when she asked me how I identified. She said she didn't want to be placed into a box and she still was unsure of who she really was. When we began immersing ourselves into literature around Latinx issues in January, Lili found herself empowered. The book that served as an inspiration was *Becoming Naomi León* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. In the book, Naomi Leon lives with her grandmother and her brother. She does not know her mother, until one day, her mother stops by and wants to have custody over Naomi. The story follows Naomi's struggle, but in the end Naomi finds the courage to stand up to her mother in front of the judge during the custody battle. This was the first novel we explored as a whole class from January to the first few weeks into February and served as a powerful door into opening up many issues for Latinx children. Naomi's bravery allowed Lili to open up to herself and to the students: In the last week of January, I wrote in my teacher weekly memos:

*Later this Tuesday, as we got into the day, Lilly had an important announcement. She said that Naomi inspired her to be brave, like in the book Becoming Naomi Leon and so she wanted to be brave too and come out as gay. "Ms. I'm gay" she said. At the beginning of the year, she had spoken with me asking me if I were heterosexual or homosexual and she had said she was queer because she was still figuring out who she was, but this Tuesday, she felt brave and more secure in her identity and she was brave just like Naomi.*

As Lili came out to the rest of the class, students were supportive. At the beginning of school, many questioned her identity. They had, had a different concept of gender identity, asking: "Miss is she a boy or a girl?" For Lili to dress differently, according to her peers, she was not fitting the norm. She was a girl, so she was supposed to dress like one. Yet, Lili challenged the stereotypes and focused on being true to herself. Sometimes, identity comes from a label and the expectations of others. When others view what they think is supposed to be a definition for

who you are, it can often lead to a struggle. The identity of many enforce the idea that the person is supposed to fit into a box, but the reality is that is not true and Lili challenged that.

She struggled in class for about six months fighting back peers questioning her identity and even the adults in the school. To everyone else, the fact that she was female meant that she needed to act and look like a girl. But, that was not who she felt she was. Students had these conversations, on their own outside the literature discussions, which is an example of just how powerful literature is, when it gives readers a spark to make change, reflect, and interact with the text and the world. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) stated,

*The text of a poem may indeed offer us a “closed form” within which to organize a work—yet at the same time, it is open to the contributions of the reader in his relationships to his own world and the world of the author. (p.88)*

Students demonstrated the powerful opportunities that literature invites readers to participate in. They not only bring in what they know to the text, but they also take meaning from the texts as they re-transform their lens of the world and their identities. Gordon Pradl (1996) adds: “with an open text, students gradually realize that they must share responsibility for learning, that multiple perspectives mark our democratic enterprise, and so they come to assert their own agency” (p. 34). For students to hold powerful discussions deriving from a personal experience or a response to an excerpt from the text demonstrates the authentic learning of students. Their discussions are not only meaningful to them as Latinx children but to the worlds around them.

This short section on gender identity wasn’t the only conversation students had. The students also conversed about the term “alien” and questioned the term as they thought about how this terminology affects the identities of many Latinx people living in the United States and those crossing into the U.S. In *Mamá the Alien* by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, the text

follows a girl who discovers her mother's identification card in the mother's purse. The main character sees the word "alien" and wonders if her mother could actually be an extraterrestrial. Throughout the book, the mother explains to her daughter what the term "alien" really means.

For students, this was a very intriguing and impactful book. First, they too wondered what the term "alien" meant and if the mom was really an alien. In one of the graffiti boards Valentín drew the mother and when I asked him why he drew that picture he said that it struck him that the mom was called an alien and he wondered if she really was one. For the student the term alien was literal, and this label was forced upon the mother. In Figure 3.35, he draws the mom as an alien.



Figure 3.35. Valentín's response to *Mamá the Alien*

It's interesting that although the book reveals that the mother is an actual human being, many students continued to draw her as an alien. In many ways, the term and the drawings illustrate the idea of dehumanization and the feeling that there is an oppressor and the oppressed in these images. Their responses show how powerful words can be, in this case the word "alien" is so powerful that students perceive that word literally and how it can define a specific group of

person in such a negative way. Lupita added that she loved the story because the little girl really thought her mom was an alien. For Lupita, the idea of the mother being an actual alien was absurd, “How can the mother really be an alien?” In figure 3.36, there is also a spaceship looking for the mother. Lupita knows that the mother is not really an alien, but that the term alien means undocumented immigrant.

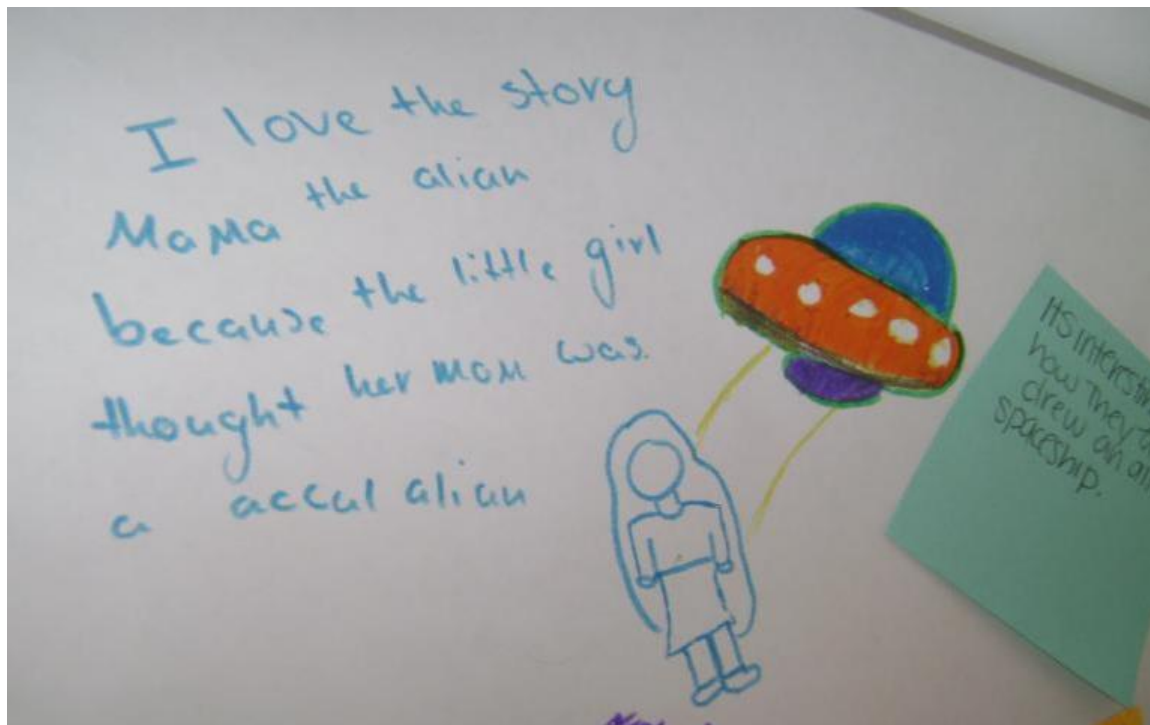


Figure 3.36. Lupita’s response to *Mamá the Alien*

When I spoke to María about her drawing she shared something interesting that I recorded in my teacher reflection journal. My journal reads:

*María came up to me today after reading the book Mamá the Alien. She had read it multiple times and had not put it down. She said to me: “Miss that is so weird that they call people who are not citizens, aliens. That is just so mean”. Lupita had heard María comment to me that she too shared her frustration. The girls shared that it was not fair that people would be identified like that in the U.S. Lupita added: “Does that mean my mom is an alien too just because she looks brown?” María and Lupita felt the label to be depriving of the human being. “They are just like us, like if they don’t have papers it still doesn’t mean that you can call them an alien or something” Lupita remarked.*

“How can we compare humans to aliens?” Lupita had asked in one of the notes I took mid-January. “We’re all human beings” Lupita added. Lupita and María’s response is a valid one. A word or a label should not be used to define someone or to place someone into a box or theme. The girls shared their frustration and their feelings about the term. Even if Latinx are citizens living in the United States, many still face struggles and obstacles and go through fears of being stopped by the border patrol or police, because skin color can also become a label, which was discussed under the theme racism against marginalized groups in the U.S.

For most students, reading about the possibility of the mom being an alien really struck them. Many images depicted the mother as an alien by the students. This definition or type of identity struck students, so that the definition became the mother. The term became literal to the students. Not only that, but students connected the term to immigration. They knew that “alien” wasn’t necessarily a good thing. On the contrary, being an alien to the students meant danger. It meant that as an illegal, the government and programs such as ICE or the border patrol are looking for immigrants to send them back. Two students depicted these images in figures 3.37 and Figure 3.38:



Figure 3.37. María’s response to *Mamá the Alien*

Something interesting in Figure 3.36 is that the mother is depicted as an alien speaking an extraterrestrial language. There is also a spaceship that looks for the mother. The term alien became the mother for María. But, remarkably, the book mentioned that the mother had a temporary residency card. The mother is depicted as not being a resident but living on earth as a visitor and the spaceship or motherboard is searching for the mother to return back to space. Figure 3.38 shows a similar response:



Figure 3.38. Juan's response to *Mamá the Alien*

In Figure 3.38 there is a spaceship and the words: “shhh” as if to say be quiet so that the mothership cannot find the alien. I analyzed the image as a portrayal of undocumented immigrants who go into hiding because they don't want to be deported. In that sense, I analyzed the drawing as a representation of undocumented immigrants and the spaceship as the border patrol or the police, where the “shhh” in the image is a warning for the “alien” or “immigrant” to keep quiet so as not to be found. Something fascinating about the image Juan drew in his sketch

to stretch, was the illustration of the figures, because the figures are not depicted as aliens, instead they are stick figures to illustrate human beings. The figure that hides behind the bush could be interpreted as an immigrant also drawn as a figure. The image can be interpreted as a refusal to draw human beings as aliens, but also understanding the term as it is a reference to immigration. The images portray a powerful message of how words can become labels, which in turn, can become the identity of the people represented.

For instance, in a written response of the book by Paula, she writes about *Mamá the Alien*, explaining how the daughter found her mother's card. She explains that a girl was "normally" playing basketball when she finds out that there is a card that reads "alien" on it and is surprised. The innocence of not knowing the real issues of being labeled an alien or an immigrant is apparent in this comment (see Figure 3.39).

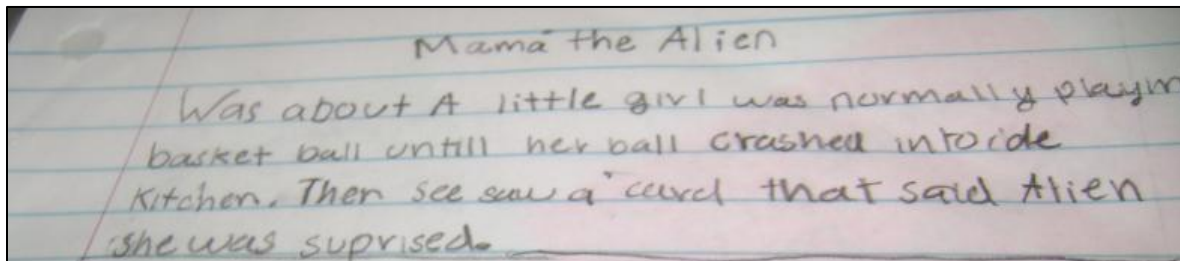


Figure 3.39. Paula's response to *Mamá the Alien*.

What is interesting about her response is that she uses the word "normally," reflecting the idea of forced identities. Sahid shared his personal experience with *Mamá the Alien* in late January as he connected to his personal experience. He shared that crossing the border was a challenge because he had a card, but his mother did not. He felt the reality of the label of alien as his mother doesn't take the risk to cross the border back into Mexico for fear that she will be found and deported or not allowed to come back to the United States. This external border became an internal border for him and his mother, because not only does his mother and his



family become aliens in the United States, but now they've also become foreign to their family back home in Mexico (see Figure 3.40).

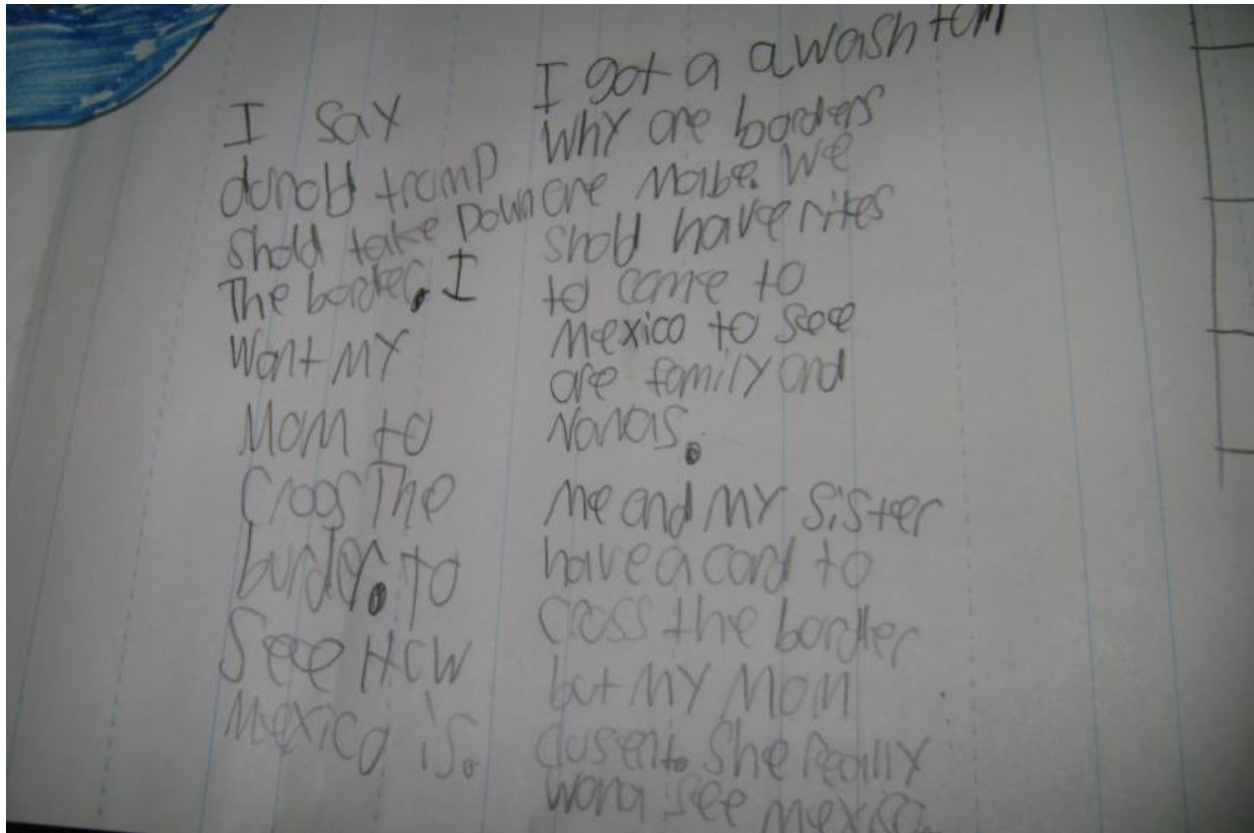


Figure 3.40. Sahid's response to *Mamá the Alien*

Sahid shares his frustration and speaks about the president advising that he take the wall down because he wants his mother to see Mexico. His response can be interpreted as a cry for help. He knows that a physical paper or card provides some sort of label, which can either be positive or negative, and in this case, he cries for his mother to have the same identity he has as a U.S. citizen. His mother's immigration status in some ways becomes her "identification" and can harm her if she attempts to cross the border.

### Obstacles and Challenges that Latinx Children Encounter and Challenge

Latinx students in this 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom reminded me that they too are children. Children enjoy playing and being with their families. However, sometimes there are obstacles that children face. One obstacle that students discussed was the obstacle of not being able to have a say in their families and in the life choices being made around them. This theme explores the obstacles that Latinx children face and the ways in which children attempt to challenge or question those obstacles or question them.

Figure 3.41 webs the challenges and obstacles students found that children face based on their own reflections of the literature they explored along with the ways in which they felt that they as young students could take action or attempt to challenge and/or question those power roles. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (2012) looks closely at a similar experience in *Childism*:

*Confronting Prejudice Against Children:*

*The word childism could similarly guide us to an understanding of various behaviors and acts against children as instances of stereotyping children and childhood. We could recognize the many social and political arrangements that are detrimental to children or that fail to meet their needs—the many anti-child trends in every aspect of our society, from legal structures to cultural productions—as instances of adult behavior toward children that is rationalize or justified by a prejudice. (p. 7)*

This definition of *childism* is important in the analysis and presentation of the data as students found it a crucial component in their lives and that of the characters' lives in the books they read. They found it important to challenge and question their rights and to share the struggles and challenges they confront by being children. This theme is a reminder that children's voices are both valid and valuable. The literature discussion circles helped children find their voices and reflect on the world around them. In return, this opportunity allowed children to challenge power roles often implemented by the adults around them.

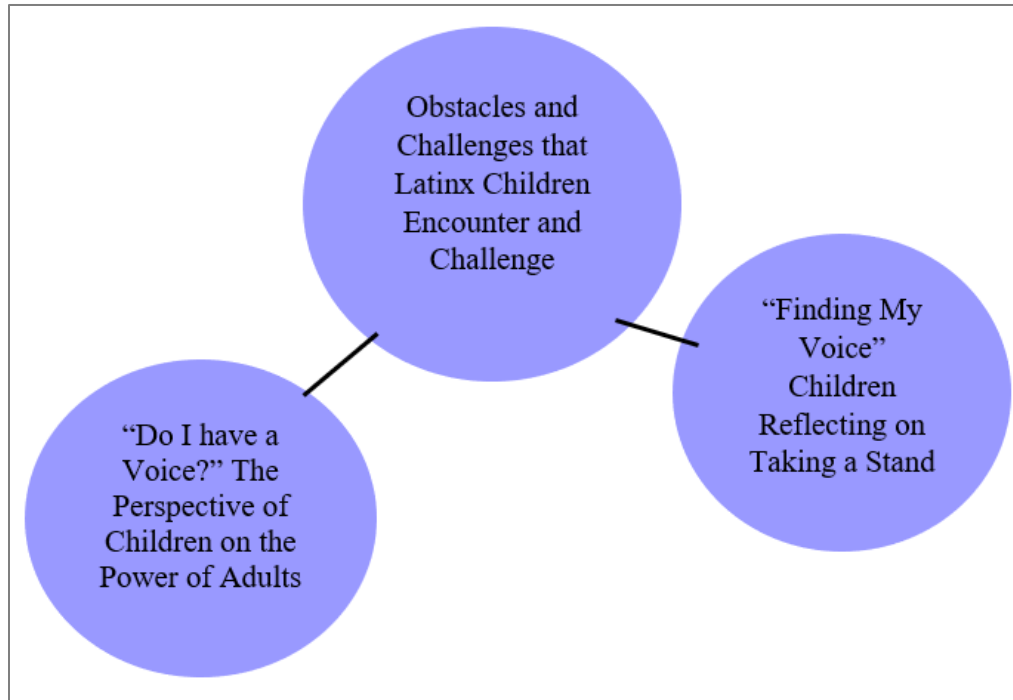


Figure 3.41. Web of the theme Obstacles and Challenges Latinx Children Face

The subthemes mapped out in figure 3.41 illustrate the concepts of *childism* explored by Young-Bruehl and those explored by students. Students did not know about the terminology during the study, but they knew that the children portrayed in many of the Latinx books had a disadvantage in comparison to the character’s adult counterparts.

### **“Do I have a Voice?” The Perspective of Children on the Power of Adults**

In *Amelia’s Road* by Linda Jacobs Altman, students pointed out the disadvantage that Amelia held. In the book, a young girl named Amelia is constantly moving home from home and school to school and has to constantly start over. She feels like she doesn’t belong to a home. She has no choice. Her parents must move from place to place to harvest yet another crop in season. This affects Amelia personally because, as she says in the book, no one knows who she really is. She wishes for stability and a home that will be permanent.

Of course, this issue is faced by Latinx children in the United States, who must move seasonally in order to pick crops. Many Latinx families turn to picking crops to make a living and to support their families. However, for both Amelia students in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, this is unfair. Students found it unfair for Amelia as she struggled moving home to home and not having a stable place to live in. Students explored Amelia's voice and pointed out she had no say in the constant moving with her family.

The book was explored and read aloud in early May as a whole class. During the whole group reading, the students were interested in Amelia. A discussion followed and I noted the discussion in my teacher reflection journal.

*The students found it unfair that Amelia was constantly moving. Rosa expressed: "Miss Serrano it's not fair that Amelia is always moving. Like she doesn't even have a choice. She just wants to have a home". Rosa understood that feeling herself as she too had experienced moving from home to home and shared how that affected her. The students agreed with Rosa's comment and said that it was not fair that Amelia was going through the situation she was.*

Students pointed out that Amelia had no voice or say. This was a different perspective for me. Yet, the child's lens allowed me to place myself in the same shoes as students through a child's perspective, and I found that their point is a valid one. Amelia did not choose to move from place to place, nor did she choose to help out in the crops, but she does so because she is dependent on her parents. Her parents need the job and that is one way their family is able to survive. Yet for Amelia, this is a struggle because she is dependent on them and has to go along with the choices her parents make. In no way were the children being rebellious, instead they were being reflective of their roles as children and the roles of the adults, in this case, parents. Neither really have a choice, but because children are dependent, they sometimes struggle with the choices or directions the parents or adults in the family make.

Another example that fits into this theme is the sketch to stretch reflection drawn by Genesis. In Figure 3.42, Genesis draws a picture of Amelia. In the image, Amelia looks saddened and voiceless. Amelia appears to have a blank look on her face, maybe thinking about her future and not knowing whether or not she would like it, or if she would finally settle into one.



Figure 3.42. Genesis' sketch to stretch for *Amelia's Road*

This response gives a sad feeling. When I asked Genesis about her drawing, she said that “Amelia is unsure about who she is because she is always moving.” She added: “She doesn’t know where she belongs because she is always moving place to place.” Genesis looks closely into identity and being rooted or grounded in a home versus not having a home. For Genesis, this puts Amelia at a disadvantage. She is not able to say where she wants to stay nor is her identity stable because of the constant moving.

Lupita brought a similar reflection in her sketch to stretch. In Figure 3.43, Lupita draws two homes and labels one as the first home and the other as second home. Amelia is drawn at the second home with a set of swings in the background.

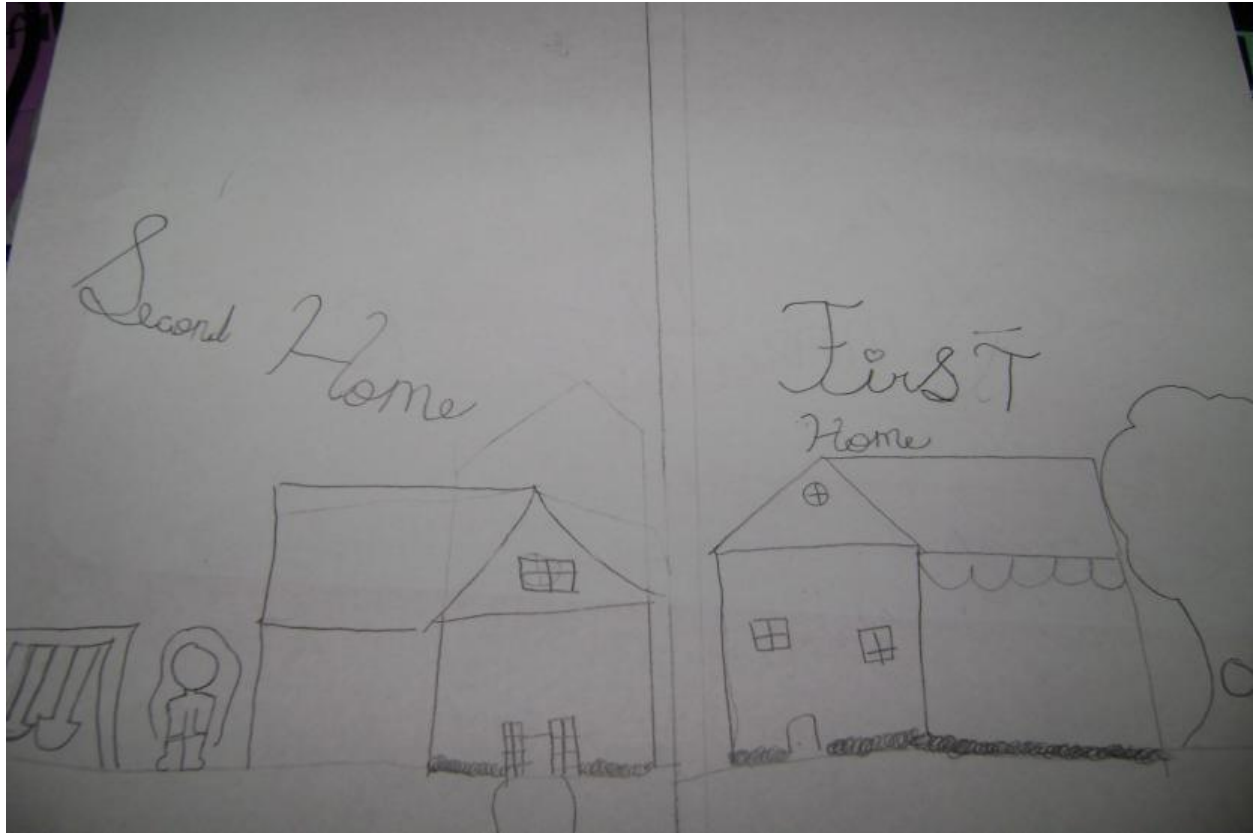


Figure 3.43. Lupita's sketch to stretch response to *Amelia's Road*

Interestingly in the image, Amelia does not have a face. Lupita had never done that before in her drawings. Could this mean that Amelia has no identity or voice? Is it due to her always moving homes like Genesis had mentioned? Is it because she is not seen as valuable? Lupita's drawing can be interpreted as the vulnerability of a child, as Amelia does not have a say in what she wants. It also hits home for many Latinx children because many do have similar experiences of moving schools or homes. For example, in the beginning of the study, there was a student in the classroom whom all the children loved. Sadly, the child moved unexpectedly. His

mother reappeared in his life and came to school one day and took all his belongings without him having a say in his mother's choice. He had lived with his grandmother most of his life and his grandmother also found this unexpected and shocking. I noted the incident in my weekly teacher reflection memos:

*This student had been absent the whole week and I remember from past conversations with him, he did not want to move. It turned out his mother was an alcoholic and irresponsible mom, so he had to live with grandma for a while. Well now, mom got custody of the child and decided to take him back and move to Phoenix. She did not even say hello or bother to have me say goodbye to her son, whom she did not even bring with her to say goodbye during lunch time. She harshly got his things and left. When my kiddos came in for lunch I felt bad. They were crying because they had lost their friend.*

The reality is that many children do not have a voice in the actions that affect them. This isn't to say that children should disrespect their parents but neither should parents disrespect their children. This analysis shows the many ways that children understand and reflect upon the vulnerability that comes along with being a child and how the actions of adults can impact them. For the student that was forced to move, Amelia was also facing a similar situation.

Another example was a written reflection formatted as a letter. To respect the student, the letter will not be explained in great detail nor will it be visually shared, however, the student wrote a letter to me, telling me how she too felt like Amelia. The student found herself not having a choice when it came to her parents' divorce. The child wrote about constantly moving to her mom's house and then her father's house. She said she really did not have a "permanent" bedroom because every Friday she had to re-pack her things to move on to the next parent. She wrote very personal and emotional letter and wished that if she had a say, she'd rather have her parents be back together because she feels lost. In the letter, the student questioned if she had a voice, and felt terrible for having this situation.

Responses to *Pepita Talks Twice* are another example of children facing obstacles or struggles and not having a voice. Adán found it upsetting that Pepita needed to talk twice. “But she doesn’t have to speak Spanish if she doesn’t want to” was his statement during a literature discussion. María also briefly hinted at this, although she liked the book. In Figure 3.44, María shares that Pepita’s parents make her talk twice.

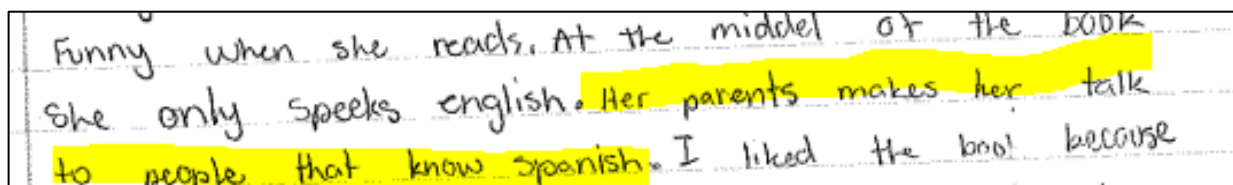


Figure 3.44. María’s response to *Pepita Talks Twice*

For María, the parents make Pepita talk to people that know Spanish. In other words, Pepita doesn’t have a choice or a voice. María continues by sharing how much she likes the book because she wished she could speak Spanish. Another reflection shared a similar response (see Figure 3.45)

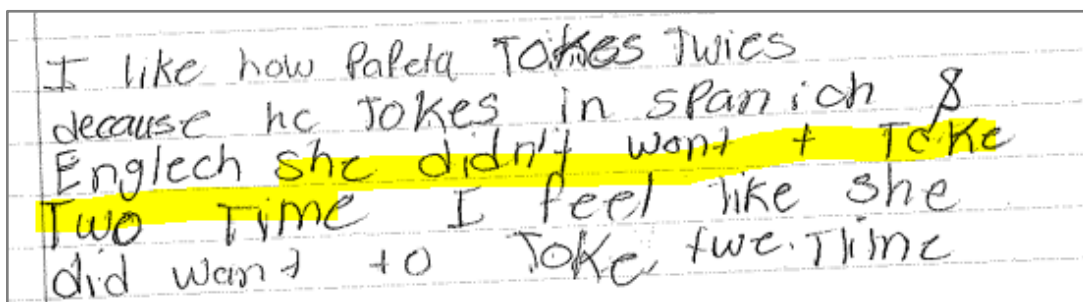


Figure 3.45. Roberto’s written response to *Pepita Talks Twice*

Roberto’s written reflection gives a similar message of Pepita not wanting to talk twice and the reader, in this case, Roberto understands that feeling and makes his point by writing it more than once: “She didn’t want to talk two time. I feel like she did want to talk two time.” When I asked the Roberto if the word was “joke” or “talk” he said “talk.” When I asked him to share his reflection he said: “Miss it’s just not fair, like Pepita doesn’t want to talk twice, but she



has to.” When sitting in on a conversation about *Pepita Talks Twice* on another occasion, Juan stated: “that’s not fair that she has to speak twice. She doesn’t want to, why can’t they leave her alone?” It stunned me that language is something children don’t necessarily decide on whether or not to learn or use it, but instead they are expected to because it’s the language spoken at home, but it does bring to question of who decides that and why.

It was interesting to see these perspectives because the students not only shared their experiences as students but as children. For them it was unfair that many children in the books they read were approaching situations that children said they shouldn’t be approaching, such as talking twice or moving place to place. Students also shared similar experiences, such as Rosa moving from place to place, to point out that they too have had those struggles.

Children incorporated these reflections when discussing immigration, identities, separation of families, and so much more. Children seek for their voices to be appreciated and valued. Yet, it becomes an obstacle because of the roles the adults around them play.

Freire (1970) touches around this when challenging the roles of teachers toward students: “Worse yet, it turns them into ‘containers’, into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher” (p.72). Children find it a struggle to have their voices valued in the classroom. The teacher must “fill” the children with knowledge and information, as if students are blank slates. Children do have voices, but sometimes are not often heard or valued and students made that clear during their reflections and literature discussions.

### **“Finding my Voice”: Children Reflecting on Taking A Stand**

Students not only pointed out ways in which they find their voices to be vulnerable in relation to the actions and choices of adults, but they also find ways in which they can respond and take a stand. Literature discussion circles are one of the ways in which children were able to

share their voices, ideas, opinions, and thoughts freely without having a fear of being “pointed out” or “scolded upon” in the classroom. Students explored ways they could challenge and find their voices through the discussions. Within those discussions, students also found ways in which characters took actions to challenge the circumstances around them. For instance, in *Amelia’s Road*, Amelia also took a stand and the students noted and celebrated that.

In the book, Amelia finds a tree, she buries a memory box that she built for herself near the tree. Amelia learns about memory boxes in school and thinks about the idea of a “home” and being grounded. She takes action by placing valuable objects from her life and rooting them near the tree she comes across. When she buries that box, she takes action. She makes a brave move, saying that she is going to find a home one day and even draws a picture of it to show to her teacher. This stood out to students. Students drew the same image Amelia drew for her teacher.

Here is Romero’s sketch to stretch, (see figure 3.46):



Figure 3.46. Romero’s Sketch to Stretch Response to *Amelia’s Road*

Most students drew a similar image. In the book, Amelia draws a picture of a house next to the tree where she buried her memory box. Students found that image powerful and recreated it. For students, Amelia taking action and drawing a home for herself was one way she was able to express her dream. She wants a stable home and, as many students shared in their sketch to stretch reflections, they too want the same for themselves and Amelia. See figure 3.47 for another student example:

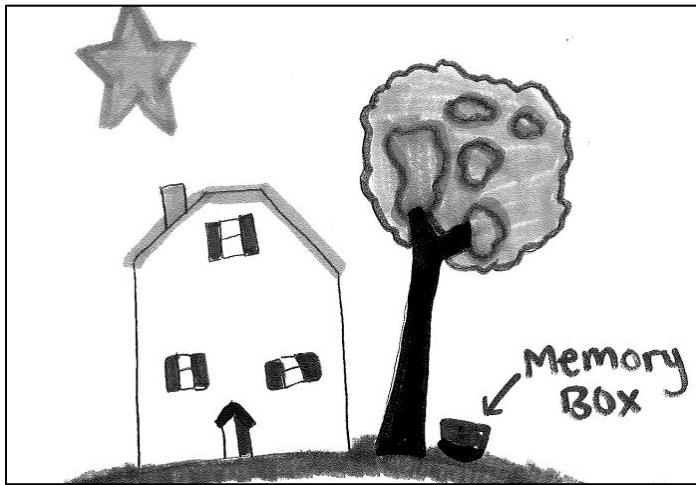


Figure 3.47. María's response to *Amelia's Road*.

Students reflected on *Amelia's Road* thinking about Amelia and her struggle with not having a home. After reading the book, the students wanted to create their own memory boxes like Amelia and bury them at the school but were unable to do that.

There were instances where some students, however, found it hard to reflect. For some students it was hard to open up or share their reflections. The topics and issues at hand really did push through boundaries and borders for these students. They had a platform to talk about these issues and, where some exploded with possible solutions or resolutions to problems, others did not know how to respond. There were instances for example, where students did not know whether or not they wanted to participate, read, or respond to such situations.

In the middle of January Paula became resistant towards the middle of reading *Becoming Naomi Leon* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. She had described how she did not like reading about Skyla (the mother of Naomi) being an alcoholic because it reminded Paula of her dad. In the novel, Naomi finds herself caught between the voices of her parents and other adults. There is a custody battle at hand and Naomi does not have control in some way. For Paula, that struggle was hard to read and reflect on.

Paula didn't know whether or not she wanted to read the book. She had expressed it to me one afternoon in tears. For Paula to take a stand and say that she did not feel comfortable was a big step; she took action. Where other students might feel they have no voice, Paula fought for her's to be heard, because these issues did matter to her. She did not want me to read the book anymore and I assured her I would respect her wishes. Going back into the classroom we talked about Paula's feelings and decisions and students respectfully agreed to stop reading the book, but the following morning, Paula wanted me and the class to keep reading. Her decision was surprising, but it was the determination to keep reading that made Paula's actions even more powerful. She was brave at the same time, she was determined. She wanted to know how the story ended.

Naomi's bravery to stand up to her mother and fight to stay with her grandmother inspired many students and Paula. Paula felt strong as she commented to me through her dialogue and reflections how proud she was for Naomi to stand up. She commented to me in the hallway, that she wanted to stand up for her father. "I don't want him to drink all of the time," was one of her comments. When I asked her: "what are you going to do about it?" I saw Paula's eyes sparkle. The event led her to having a conversation with her family, her dad and mom, with her dad trying to work to be better for Paula.

For Lili, *Becoming Naomi Leon*, was an inspiration for her to “come out.” Where at first these issues and topics seemed difficult to discuss, the conversations were getting easier, because literature discussions were becoming a place for students to comfortably bring themselves into the conversations and not only explore difficult topics, but act on those topics and issues. In many ways, literature discussions valued their voices as students explored issues through their lens. This space was not dominated by teacher or adult voices, instead, the discussions derived from students’ interactions with each other and the texts.

Lili, was able to “find her voice.” Before the study, Lili was unsure of who she was. She was told to dress a certain way and much of her identity was questioned, but as students explored the books, Lili was able to reflect on the characters of the books and came to realize that children such as herself do have a voice and that she could use that voice to stand up for herself in powerful ways.

Many students found opportunities to dialogue, reflect, and take action. Students transformed through the dialogues and literature discussion explorations. The topics were relevant to them and they were able to connect and reflect with the characters of the picturebooks, novels, and novels in verse. Students found themselves critically thinking about topics around immigration, separation of families, and racism, and even questioned the topics and books explored. Adán, wrote in his written reflection: “I don’t know if I like this” as seen in Figure 3.48.

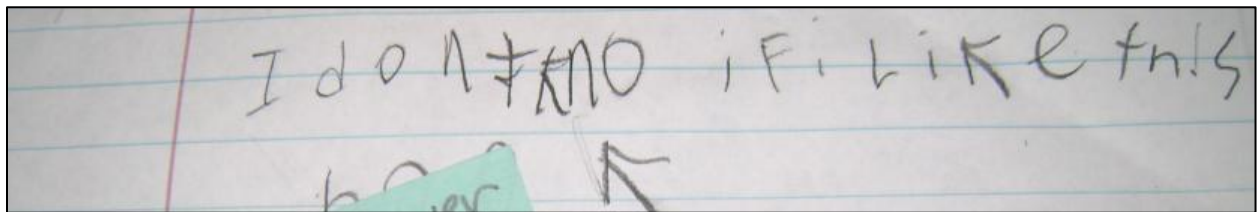


Figure 3.48. Adán’s response to books on immigration

For Adán, questioning the topics and issues around immigration was a big step. He was critically thinking about the issues around immigration and how immigration affects families, while reading *The Journey* and *Dreamers*. For Adán to stand up and question and think about this allowed him to find his voice and share that with others.

Students had created a space along with me as their teacher to have open conversations around topics like this, and, yet, many still had fear, but that did not stop them from sharing their voices, opinions, reflections, and emotions. Adults do have voices and they do hold power roles different than those of children, but children are an example of change and transformation when given the opportunity to share their voices in the classroom

### **The Fear Latinx Communities Face in The United States**

Latinx communities in the United States do face fear. Whether that be in the process of crossing into the United States or already living in the U.S. Latinx communities face many obstacles and struggles as explored in the six themes for this chapter, and with those obstacles there is a sense of fear. Latinx communities face separation of families, racism, immigration, and so much more. Latinx communities fear losing their family members, being separated from their families, approaching violence, coyotes, and so much more.

For these 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, fear was an important emotion to talk about because students found those fears relatable to their own lives. They shared their emotions and the fear of being vulnerable to certain situations as children as well as being part of the Latinx community. In this theme, student examples and reflections are explored to share the fears that students found valuable to discuss. This section includes this theme along with two subthemes that the students found in relation to the notion of fear (see Figure 3.49). The subthemes include examples coming from written responses, graffiti boards, sketch to stretch artifacts, student dialogue, and teacher

reflection notes. Not all of the discussions of or around fear are explored in this section, as there are many, but only a couple of examples are explored closely to illustrate students' interactions with the concept of fear and their lens on the books they discussed.

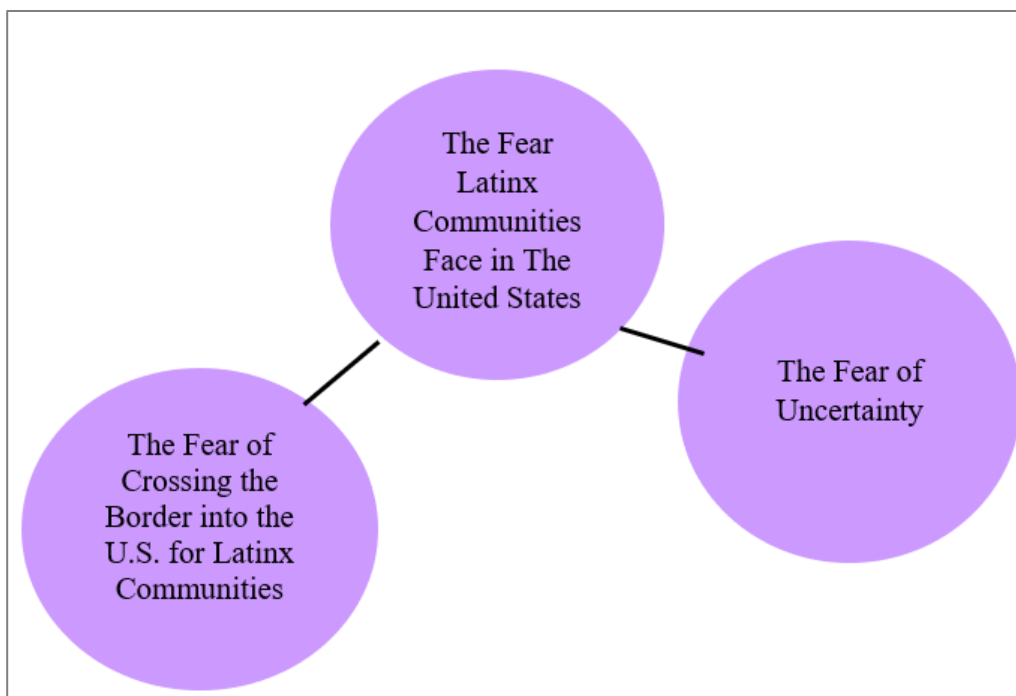


Figure 3.49. Web of the theme The Fear Latinx Communities Face in the United States

### **The Fear of Crossing the Border into the U.S. for Latinx Communities**

Many of the fears that seemed to come up the most were those around the border. A lot of students shared fears such as the fear of the border patrol and being deported, or losing their families, or constantly moving from home to home just like Amelia in *Amelia's Road*. Manuel shared with me in January, his fear for his dad getting sick or dying while crossing the border. Thus, crossing into the United States for many of the Latinx communities and students held many risks and fears.

For instance, when students explored *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna, students feared for both the mother and her children when they were attempting to cross the border. The mother

was not crossing from Latin America to the U.S., but the concept that she was moving from her home to another country brought a sense of fear from students as they read about her journey.

In this book, the illustrations follow a mother and her two children, a son and a daughter, as refugees trying to cross a border to find a safer home. The reader doesn't really know exactly what happens to the father in the book, but the assumption is that he's not alive. Rosa who read this book and participated in the graffiti board in January, drew the following images of those children, as seen in Figure 3.50.

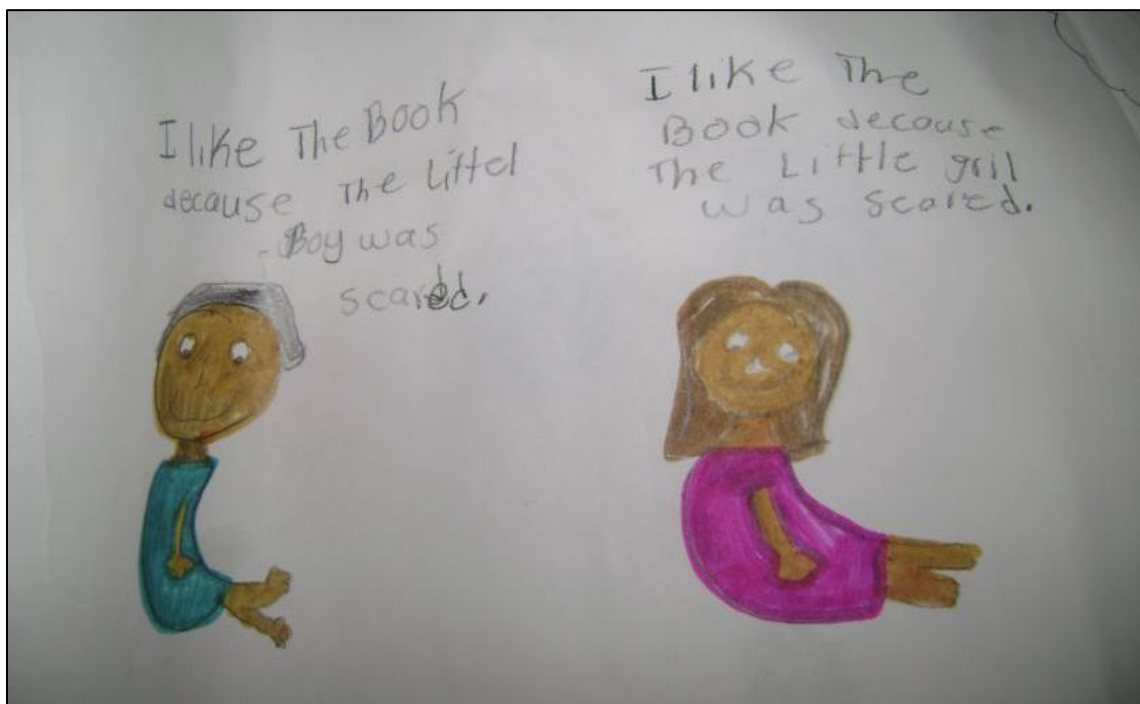


Figure 3.50. Rosa's graffiti board response to *The Journey*

In the graffiti board drawing, Rosa's words: "I like the book because the boy is scared" and "I like the book because the girl is scared" can be interpreted as her connecting with the children because the child may have also had a similar experience. Rosa found value in the boy and girl having a sense of fear because the student understands the vulnerability that comes with that, and fear is a humanistic perspective many can connect and relate to. In childhood it is normal to have fears and to share your fears with someone. Louise Rosenblatt (1965) states,



“The child and the adolescent often learn from books the culturally appropriate emotional response to types of situations or people” (p. 179). Thus, it makes sense that as a reader, Rosa, was connecting with the character’s situation and emotional response.

The fear of crossing the border may mean approaching border patrol, police, or guards. For Joel reflecting on *The Journey* something that stood out was the role of the border patrol and the fear that comes along with that. Many students drew figures of border patrol or police and the fear of being arrested, murdered, sent back, or captured by the border patrol. One figure that illustrated this powerfully is going to be referenced here once again (see Figure 3.11). In the image is a graffiti board image where the “guard” in *The Journey* is drawn bigger. The image displays a sense of power coming from the guard those he sends away as voiceless and powerless. With that notion of power comes fear for those crossing the border. For families to have to face someone asking them to go back is scary because the family may be trying to escape the hardships from their previous home. A lot of this conversation can be connected to Brianna’s story where she too fled her country as a refugee and shared that she was scared.

Students communicated their fears through their discussions and their sketch to stretch images. Once again, students talked about the border and the police. In one image (refer to Figure 3.38), Juan draws a spaceship looking for the “alien” or immigrant, who hides behind the bush. The act of hiding brings about a sense of the fear of being caught or captured. Once again, fear results towards those who hold power and have the power to send someone back. These are fears that children hold, especially as Mexican Americans in the United States living so close to the border.

Another example of the fear about crossing the border was the fear of crossing into the border and facing the coyote. The coyote in *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* attempts to kill Pancho Rabbit, who is only looking for his dad. Many students shared their fear for Pancho Rabbit. For instance, Adán in his sketch to stretch reflection around February drew the following image (see Figure 3.51).



Figure 3.51. Adán's response to Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote

In Figure 3.51, there is fear of Pancho Rabbit being killed is evident. Although, Pancho Rabbit isn't killed and is saved by his father and his father's friends, Adán shared that he really feared for Pancho Rabbit's life. He said: "I am just scared for Pancho Rabbit because he really did trust the coyote and then the coyote tricked him and I really thought he was going to die. It was scary". Like Adán, many students fear the violence and the dangers Latinx communities come across, especially those crossing from Latino America into the United States.

Other students drew more violent and dangerous responses. For example, Paulo drew the fear of being killed by the border patrol or by other people when trying to cross the border. This becomes a fear around dying in the border patrol (see Figure 3.52).

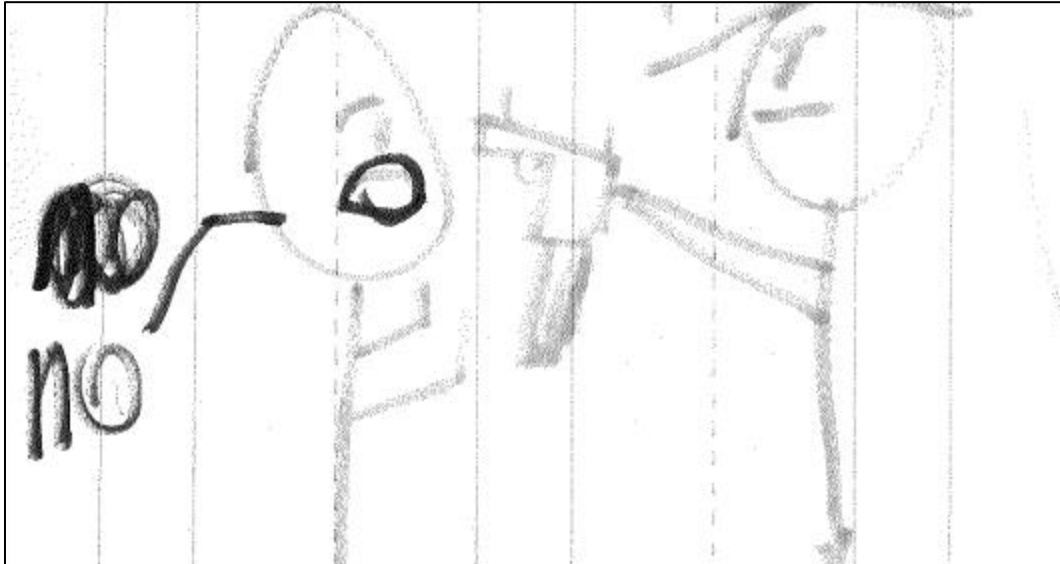


Figure 3.52. Paulo's response to *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*

This stick figure can be interpreted as an immigrant being held at gun point. The figure on whom the gun is being pointed holds their hands up and says no. The mouth is drawn dark as is the word “no,” maybe to show an emphasis on how the figure does not want to die. The figure looks scared, whereas the other figure looks angry.

Many fears were also around separation of family. Students feared having families separated. Manuel for example, feared for his father always moving from the border between Mexico to the U.S. and back and being caught or separated from his father.

Fear isn't only inhabited by students, but by the characters in the books and adults too. There is fear of facing challenges when crossing into the border. The fears can be separated from family to being caught by the border patrol to trusting coyotes. The fear of crossing into the border to come into the United States is real and brings in a deep reflection from the students when discussing those fears.

## The Fear of Uncertainty

Students also discussed the fear of being uncertain. That fear of uncertainty was mostly around not knowing what something is to not knowing the future. In this short section, the fear of uncertainty is explored closely through a Latinx perspective.

The fears that many children discussed were the fears of being uncertain for the future. That fear was something that really stood out in *Amelia's Road*. When Genesis drew the image of Amelia (see Figure 3.42), Genesis expressed her fear for Amelia not knowing who she was or where she was going to end up. Many students feared for Amelia. Would Amelia always be living like this? Will she ever have a home? Students feared not knowing what Amelia's future would be like as they also expressed that Amelia must have also been feeling the same.

Another example of the fear for an uncertain future was the fear for the mother and the children in *The Journey* and whether the mother and the children find a safe place. Will the guards be looking for them in the future? Students found these two texts very important to discuss as they had an open ending. There really is an uncertainty as to what happens to the characters and there is no concept of a happily ever after, which for many Latinx communities that is the reality, nothing is ever certain.

On the other hand, there was a different fear that many students shared, and this had to do more with Latinx communities or marginalized communities living in the U.S. and being in school. This was something that was discussed briefly by students. In *I'm New Here* by Anne Sibley O'Brien, students shared their fears of being uncertain about the English language as an English language learner. The majority of these students are English language learners and they connected with the characters in the book as they too have faced coming into the United States and not knowing English. Genesis, depicted an image found in the book (see in Figure 3.53).



Figure 3.53. Genesis' response to *I'm New Here*

The image can be interpreted as the fear of being uncertain of the new language a child from a different county is immersed in. This image was important to depict because of Genesis' fear of not knowing English and not understanding what people are saying. There is also a fear of peer pressure because the girl in this image represents the character in the book as unsure if her peers like her.

Another text that was explored was *My Diary from Here to There* where the character has to go to the United States from Mexico. The family moves to the U.S. for work. In the book, the girl is separated from her best friend and family members. For Genesis, who explored this book in March, the fear of losing a friend and not knowing if the character will ever see her friend again is something that stood out to her (see Figure 3.54).

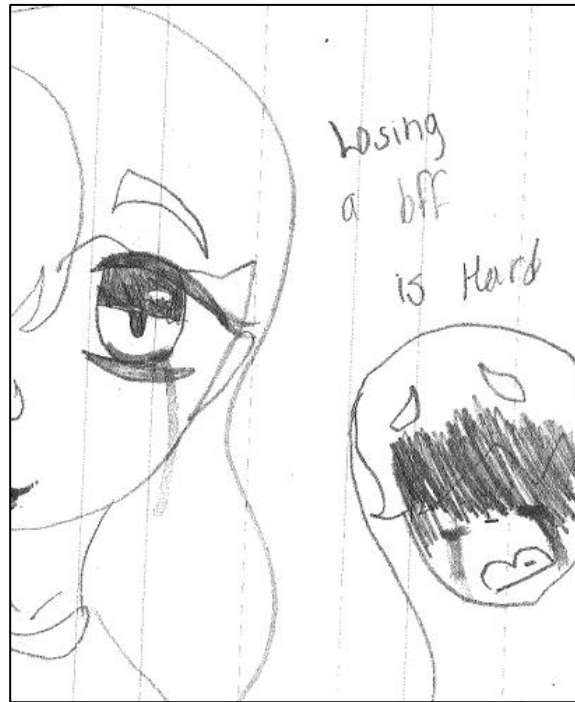


Figure 3.54. Genesis' response to *My Diary From Here to There*

The girl in the image on the left looks forward. The girl on the right looks sad with lines going down her face to represent tears. The mouth is open. This image was illustrated from where the girl has to move to the United States and leaves her friend behind. This image can be interpreted as the fear of losing someone close, such as a friend, and not knowing whether there will be a reunion in the future.

Children brought many fears of being uncertain, whether it was uncertainty for the future, losing someone and not sure whether there will be a reunion, to not knowing the language as

someone who comes from another country. For children being uncertain does bring fear because there is no certainty of how things will end or if there will be a happy ending.

Students illustrated these fears closely and clearly as they connected with emotions throughout the journey of this study. Students also held their own fears during the literature discussion circles, some were centered around the texts explored, yet there were other fears that derived from outside the texts and outside the topics.

Students also explored uncertainty of something happening around their lives. In March, there was a lot of fears about a scam on social media, particularly happening on YouTube, where a figure called the “Momo” would interrupt children’s videos to ask children to perform dangerous tasks. A hideous figure would appear on screen and threaten children. Because children were talking about their fears of the border or uncertainty, they also used this space to discuss their fear of the Momo. For children, this event put them in a very vulnerable position and it was only normal to share those fears with each other through this time period as they also connected to the books. A couple of images of the “Momo” were found in the data such as the following images (see Figures 3.55 and 3.56):

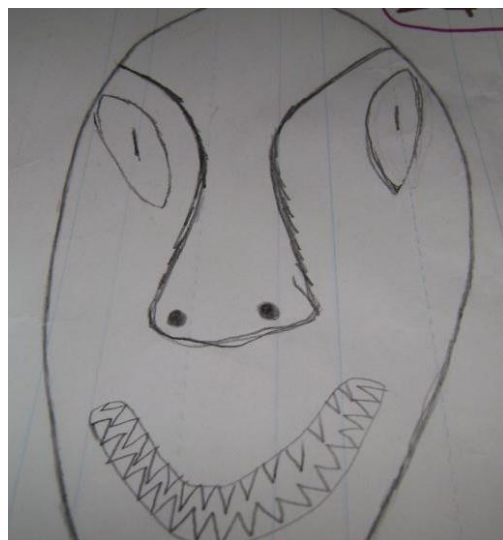


Figure 3.55. Graffiti board drawing of “Momo”.

For the students discussing about the Momo was valuable to them because it was happening in their homes. They wanted a place to talk and share their fears as well as try to find out what the Momo really was.

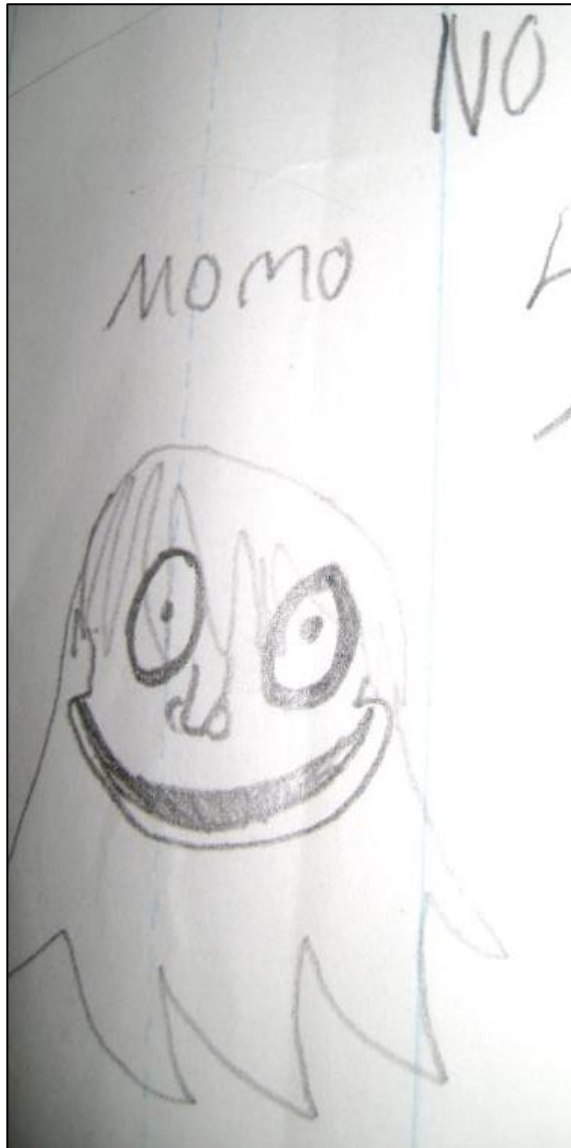


Figure 3.56. A second picture of Momo in the same Graffiti board.

Students found value in talking about the Momo and their other fears through the lens of children's and Latinx issues. They saw literature discussions as spaces to think deeply about their emotions, feelings, experiences, stories, and overall reflections of the texts and issues in which



they engaged. For students it was important to include discussions of real world situations and the issues that were and are occurring within the United States around Latinx communities.

### **The Relationship Between Student Dialogue and Literature Discussion Strategies**

In the first section of chapter 3, the question, what social issues students discuss, was explored. It was through the analysis of student dialogue, written responses, sketch to stretch artifacts, teacher reflection journal notes, weekly memos, and overall student reflections that seven intertwining themes, each paired with subthemes grew. The themes and subthemes reflected social issues that the students found valid and valuable to discuss. In addition, the social issues were discussed within a Latinx lens.

Students discussed social issues that they found meaningful, such as issues around the border between the United States and Mexico, family separation, and much more. The discussions provided insight to the strong connections many Latinx students in the United States made to the issues affecting them beyond the classroom. In return, students' voices provided me with insight into the meaningful experiences they bring while creating a classroom community that enhanced reflection, critical thinking, dialogue, empathy, and above all love for each other .

With that said, the first section focused specifically on the question: what social issues do students discuss in literature groups? For this second section of the chapter, the second question for this study is explored: How do response strategies influence student dialogue? Thus, the focus for this section is to explore the dialogue strategies and the relationship of those strategies to the reflections of Latinx students in literature discussions.

Students were invited to use literature discussion strategies when exploring books. The students participated in graffiti boards, sketch to stretch, and written reflections. Student discussions were recorded with an audio recorder and student work was collected for analysis.

Each literature discussion strategy students engaged in is explored closely to see the relationship each of these strategies had to student dialogue and thinking. For instance, how do graffiti boards impact student reflections in relation to sketch to stretch? Will student reflection be more meaningful when written down than when using sketch to stretch? Which strategy promoted critical thinking and dialogue? How did these strategies help support students? Is there a strategy that is better than another? What strategy is the most informative of student thinking? These questions are kept in mind as each strategy is discussed and explored briefly.

### **Graffiti Boards**

In the classroom the first dialogue strategy students and I incorporated were graffiti boards. As students interact with the texts and each other, they create connections, experiences, and emotions that they can quickly write or sketch on paper. These experiences allow students to create meaning and make sense of them, to quickly capture their “in process” thinking.

Thus, graffiti boards are an opportunity for students to read a selection of books, in this case, a pair of books from a text set surrounding a Latinx lens to share student thinking by quickly writing or sketching their thoughts. Graffiti boards require a large sheet of paper with markers of various colors for students to use. Students engage in reading and at various points of the reading, students are invited to stop, jot down or sketch, and share with each other. After students draw and/or write their reflections on the large paper, then, the students share with each other what they drew or wrote about. They made add to the paper as their thinking evolves.

With graffiti boards, students see connections among each other, and it promotes questioning. The concept of the graffiti board is for students to use the space for their thinking to take its own shape either by writing or sketching their thinking anywhere on the page like graffiti on a wall.

For the graffiti board and purpose of the study, students were grouped in four to allow for students to have an equal space to write or sketch their reflections and an equal platform to discuss with their peers. The graffiti board was a valuable piece in the literature discussions occurring in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. As indicated by the fact that they make up most of the data collected for the study. This was an effective strategy that students found useful and accessible and was used for almost each pairing of books.

The graffiti board was an effective strategy for students for their discussions, because it allowed students to quickly write or sketch their ideas. Students had the chart right in front of them and it became a way for them to see each other's work and pose questions to one another. The graffiti board also allowed students to share their thinking with each other easily because they could refer to their thinking since it was right in front of them.

The effectiveness of the graffiti board for students became evident when looking at their work and listening to their discussions. All the discussions recorded came from doing graffiti boards. Graffiti boards became an effective method to have students discuss with each other in their small groups. The graffiti board allowed students to make connections with each other by allowing them to see their peer's work while at the same time, the graffiti boards supported students' time to reflect, think, and question their peer's thinking. For instance, when Paula and Lupita were talking about the border wall and Lupita mentioned the border is like a cage for dogs, that discussion grew because of Lupita's writing and thinking; the discussion allowed students to go back and add to the graffiti board as a method for adding to the discussion or question others' thinking. For example, Paula used the graffiti board in that group to add to her thinking after listening to her peer's discussions as she replied to Lupita's comment on her metaphor of Mexicans being seen as pitbulls (see Figure 3.12) . Thus, graffiti boards were great

tools for the classroom to spark discussions around the texts explored, while also encouraging thinking and questioning of the experience's students engaged in.

Although graffiti boards sparked discussions, for some students, graffiti boards may have been a bit intimidating. Going back through the audio there were a couple of instances where certain students didn't share as much because another student was leading the discussion. The peers found that student's discussion interesting and may have not interrupted, but instead may have wanted to listen to that student discuss. Some students found themselves asking or reaching out to other students to get everyone to share, but a student may have not wanted to share so passed or shared a very short response. For example, Romero in one small group discussion was asked to share his ideas and he shared a very short response of the books *Marisol McDonald* and *Alma and How She Got Her Name*. Students who didn't participate as much in the graffiti boards might have not participated for many reasons. One reason, for example, the student may be shy. A second reason is the student may have felt uncomfortable to share his or her thoughts, not knowing how peers may respond. A third reason for not sharing may be because the student didn't feel the need to say anything. Four, the student maybe wanted to share but other peers are not giving him or her the space to share. Five, the student may feel uncomfortable about the issues being brought up in the discussion. Six, the child's thoughts may seem irrelevant to the peer's discussion.

Overall, graffiti boards were very effective for capturing student thinking and facilitating dialogue. The discussions flowed easily through the group because the thoughts and reflections of students were accessible to the student speaking and to the peers around the student speaking. Students were able to see their reflections on the page and share that with the group and spark questioning as well as thinking and reflecting and going back to add more to the reflections

already placed on the graffiti boards. Where some students found it uncomfortable to speak in front of a group, others found it helpful to share and speak with each other about the issues raised.

As both the teacher and researcher, graffiti boards were also helpful in my analysis of the data. The graffiti boards served as a method of collecting multiple responses on one page, in this case on the chart paper. This allowed me as both the teacher and the researcher to see the common responses that students shared but it also allowed me to see the things that stood out to students that was perhaps different from their peers. Graffiti boards served as reminders that students share common ideas and thoughts, but also pose different responses to the texts and to each other, which is valuable as students embrace different points of view.

The graffiti boards were also informative as they allowed me as both the teacher and the researcher, to see and interpret the kinds of conversations that arose in that discussion. For instance, if many students drew a border wall for one set of books, I assumed that the conversation revolved around the border wall the most.

Graffiti boards were great in providing me with the data all at once. The audio recording also complimented the graffiti boards taking place, where I was able to see the work the students were discussing while listening to their discussion. However, for some graffiti boards that I did not have an audio recorder for, I found that it was hard to really know what or how the conversation evolved or took shape. For example, on one of the graffiti boards an image of the “momo” appeared. I would have liked to have had an audio recording as to why students connected the books to the “momo” and how that discussion went (see Figures 3.55 and 3.56).

Graffiti boards was a great method for the classroom, and this was something that the students and I found ourselves gravitating towards the most. Most of the data comes from graffiti

boards as this was a very accessible tool for students and I to use in the classroom space. It was also a great “discussion starter” for students. The graffiti board promoted a lot of great discussions and allowed group members to hold each other accountable for their ideas.

## Written Responses

Written responses were another way that students could reflect on their reading experiences. The written responses took place mostly towards the end of the study around April to May. This was due to time as students were preparing for promotion and end of the year assessments. The written responses were an opportunity for students to read a pair of books as a whole class because of the time constraint, then students went to their seats and began writing about what they were reading. In April written responses were also used in small groups where the children read a pair of books with their group and then went into writing.

The written responses served a deep and clear understanding of the students’ thinking and reflections. Written responses dug a little deeper into student thinking, understanding, and reflections on the text. This became evident as written responses reflected detailed student thinking and questioning. One example, is Figure 3.45, where Roberto is thinking about Pepita not wanting to speak twice in *Pepita Talks Twice* (see Figures 3.45). Student writing was not limited to a word or a sketch, on the contrary, student thinking became concise as students composed ideas to share and explain their thinking. Written responses extended student thinking and gave details or explanations that were not seen on graffiti boards.

Students could write freely in their written responses because their peers would not be reading their responses, allowing students to write how they felt and what they were thinking. Their thoughts didn’t depend on what another peer might say or think. Instead, their writing

clearly demonstrated the child's own independent thinking and voice. Thus, written responses gave student liberty to write about their views.

Written responses were a valuable experience and opportunity. Some students who were shy found written responses a better method because they did not have to speak in front of others. Other students who have a hard time sharing their ideas found written responses valuable, because written responses allowed them time to think and process their thinking through writing.

Written responses were not timed during the study nor were students limited to several words. This allowed students time to really think about the topics and issues they found in the texts. They could think at their own pace, stop, reflect, and then write once again.

As a researcher and a teacher, the written responses served as a great tool for my own understanding of the students' thinking and reflections. For instance, in one written response Paula and María spoke differently about *Mamá the Alien* than when talking to her group. María and Paula found themselves deeply thinking about the book and immigration, where in their discussions, the group seemed more focused on the mom looking like an alien or how funny it was the thought of the little girl in the book really thinking about her mom as an actual alien (see Figures 3.37 and 3.39).

Many times, writing speaks to the lens of the writer. Written responses became a doorway into the hearts, minds, and voices, of children. Students who might not share as deeply in conversations or graffiti boards immersed themselves into the conversations through their written responses. As a teacher and researcher, I was able to learn more about the child's thinking. The written responses shone light on a student and the issues that student found valuable. The students expanded within the issues and topics and as a researcher I was able to see multiple perspectives. At the same time, I was able to see commonalities among the children's

written responses. Although the children may have approached the issues differently, many of them wrote about similar things. For instance, in *Waiting for Papá* a text that talked about a boy missing his father, many students shared how sad they felt for the boy missing his dad and added how they too have felt that way because they have experienced similar events through immigration or divorce

Written responses were a valuable tool in the classroom for literature discussions. It promoted opportunities for children to think deeply and write about the issues they found important to them. The students were then able to share and although the direction of the conversations went in a different direction in the small group discussions, the written responses served as a snapshot of what was valuable to the student at that time.

### **Sketch to Stretch**

The sketch to stretch activities were also used mostly from April to May, due to time constraints with final assessments and promotion practices. However, sketch to stretch became valuable tools for students to share their thinking. Sketch to stretch served as an opportunity for students to listen to a reading of a pair of books and then go back to their seats. According to Kathy Short (2011), sketch to stretch, “can create meaning in many sign systems” and “students are encouraged to go beyond a literal understanding of what they have experienced and to recognize that more than one interpretation exists” (p. 1). In addition, “sketch to stretch creates new understandings created through a process called transmediation” (p.1).

Sketch to stretch was mostly used for *Amelia's Road* as we approached time constraints towards the end of the school year. Sketch to stretch was a way for students to read the book as a class and then make a sketch to show their reflections of the text and issues discussed. This



literature discussion strategy, became a pathways allowing students do draw their thinking taking students beyond the literal interpretations to a figurative interpretation of the texts and issues explored. Their drawings reflected something they found interesting, valuable, questionable, and in many ways reinforced the message or thinking gained from the character in the story. For instance, in *Amelia's Road*, many students replicated the image that the main character *Amelia* drew (see Figures 3.19 and 3.20). Sketch to stretch allowed Lupita to go beyond the replication of *Amelia's* drawing and instead, Lupita's sketch to stretch reflected two homes (see Figure 3.44)

Sketch to stretch was a strategy that supported students who found it difficult to express in words how they felt. The quote, "a picture is worth a thousand words," is valuable in this situation. For some students, writing was hard, sometimes because a student could not find the right words or had trouble with writing and spelling. So, sketching was a wonderful opportunity for students to think and draw to expand their thinking.

The sketch to stretch activities that I saw around *Amelia's Road* were similar to each other as many students drew the same house that *Amelia* had drawn in the book. The drawings of the children were a clear representation that the issue around moving homes was something they found valuable. Students felt for *Amelia* and wished that she had a home just as *Amelia* had wished that for herself.

Sketch to stretch provided time to think and draw and reflect on their thinking. Students were able to then use their drawing to share with one another. Sketch to stretch allowed children to see differences and similarities within their drawings and thinking.

As a teacher researcher, I too, was able to see the commonalities and differences within the images drawn by students. The sketch to stretch images allowed me to see which students

had a similar perspective or reflection. Although, sometimes, it was hard to tell. Why did the students choose to draw Amelia's picture of the house by the tree? Did they want that for Amelia? Did they like Amelia's drawing? Sketch to stretch may be vague in that sense in that I was interpreting the image and making an inference on student thinking. Those were some of the difficulties I faced as a teacher researcher and should have followed through with interviewing children about their sketches. However, sketch to stretch was an important and valuable method for students because each sketch to stretch represented the child's thinking.

### **Conclusion**

The students were intrigued with the process of reading the texts and sharing their ideas but also learning about the books and each other. Their conversations and drawings in return taught me the significance of providing experiences that students bring to the classroom paired with literacy to promote critical , which leads to reflection, action, and transformation. As a researcher and teacher of Latinx students, and as a Latina myself, I learned more about values we as Latinx hold. Latinx communities have an immense bank of knowledge, resources, opinions, stories, and it is through story that they are invited to engage and share who they are with each other. The dialogue in the classroom not only created bonds between students and myself, but bonds with each other and their world. Students feel connected and recognized for their experiences. Exploring the themes and subthemes allows for a fresh lens on issues and perspectives that are valuable and valid for the Latinx community while at the same time, brings attention to the value of diverse literature and educational experiences in the classroom.

## CHAPTER 4

### Teacher Decision Making

*Diversity really means becoming complete as human beings—all of us. We learn from each other. If you're missing on that stage, we learn less. We all need to be on that stage.*

*-Juan Felipe Herrera*

Chapter 3 looked closely at student artifacts to identify themes and subthemes to express the stories, experiences, and reflections that Latinx students found important. The chapter looked at the ways in which themes connected and intertwined with each other to respond to the first two questions. In this chapter, the third question for this research is explored as I reflect on how the theoretical frame influenced my decision making as a teacher.

Chapter 4 also discusses my approach and reflection of the data and my process for conducting the research through a theoretical lens, specifically observing how theory influenced my teaching practices before, throughout, and after the study. Multiple theories and theorists are explored in this chapter as the theories and theorists presented, impacted my view of education and my own pedagogical practices.

As a teacher researcher, my approach to education doesn't solely rely on teaching practices, but on theories about education. Theories inform teachers of their teaching and provide teachers with opportunities to select theory-based teaching practices. Shagoury and Power (2012) state. "What we read as we do research determines in part what we see in our classrooms and who we are as researchers" (p.171).

Therefore, becoming immersed in theory and research allows teacher researchers to see beyond their current teaching practices and find new voices and think about new approaches in education to support learning and critical thinking. Theory becomes an informative tool to

support teachers in constructing curriculums to support students and their own approaches to teaching. For instance, theories inform teachers on how to apply teaching practices and the stances teachers can take to be culturally responsive or effective when implementing reading practices in the classroom. For myself, theory plays a big role and component into my construction not just for the research I sought to create, but for my teaching practices as an educator. Hence, theory becomes a central vessel in my teaching.

It was through theory that I was able to reflect on my growth as a student by reflecting on my own elementary experiences in Las Mariposas Elementary and how I, as an educator, could implement theories to create new and valuable experiences for students that may not have fully been there for me as a child. Thus, theories for me as a teacher play a big influence in how I approach students and the overall learning environment. Theory has taught me how students learn, how to best support environments that invite children to think deeply and reflect about the world around them, invite students' stories, and question the traditional classroom environment. Theories bounce off each other to construct a pathway to invite students to reflect, transform, and take action. Theories invite teachers and students to bring in the cultures of the community and to pose real world questions that matter. Theories are both informative and constructive, allowing teachers to take a step back and reflect on their teaching practices and take a step forward to see things through a different lens. In that sense, theory is a valuable treasure chest with differing voices, perspectives, and questions, enabling the educator to take shifts as one reflects and transforms.

This chapter extends the theoretical pieces that have been influential for my own teaching practices as I approached this teacher research. The theories I share in this chapter are the

theories that truly matter to my approach to education and the practices I seek to build to invite students' stories and experiences in the classroom.

### **Theoretical Frames that Influenced My Decision Making as A Teacher**

Many theories have been influential to my approach in conducting teacher research for this dissertation. In fact, being immersed in theories as a graduate student at the University of Arizona is what allowed me a deeper and critical lens around education. The theories that I was immersed in during my studies allowed me the opportunity to positively question myself, my teaching practices, and my experiences in education. As I read through many theories and voices around the role of education in the classroom and literacy instruction, I was able to see a different and powerful approach to my own education practices.

As a reader, I enjoy reading children's literature and creating powerful reading experiences for students. As mentioned in chapter one, my literacy experiences in school did not speak to my cultural identity. In fact, of the books that I did read, many explored situations outside my own. Since I hadn't lived many of those experiences, it was hard to connect with the characters in the story or understand most of the context. The reading I was immersed in, however, were powerful as I was able to see beyond my own lens and life. The reading lessons I grew up with taught me to dissect the text to find specific information or details to answer comprehension questions and taught me how to be direct in my reading experiences.

As a teacher going into graduate studies with a focus on children's literature I learned that reading can go beyond what I had grown up to understand about the possibilities of reading experiences. Reading no longer became an activity, but an experience. As a child, reading was a compliment to answering comprehension questions, finding character traits, citing references,

and pinpointing the figurative language. At times, reading was an enjoyment both at school and at home. Reading became an escape from reality and a journey into the unknown. In graduate studies, I saw reading through a more critical lens. Reading can be an experience. Reading can be culturally responsive, and reading can be a partner in critical thinking. This revelation of reading became clear with Louise Rosenblatt's work, one of the first theorists that I came across.

Louise Rosenblatt (1965) expresses a powerful stance on literacy:

*Certainly, to the great majority of readers, the human experience that literature presents is primary. For them the formal elements of the work—style and structure, rhythmic flow—function only as a part of the total literary experience. The reader seeks to participate in another's vision—to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible.*  
(p.7)

Rosenblatt's voice allowed me a different perspective on literacy from an education and reader standpoint. Growing up in the traditional classroom, literature was taught to find an exact interpretation. The teacher held the right response and it was the students' responsibility to find the answers to reading comprehension questions. I remember how difficult it was for me to understand and find the interpretation of my teachers. As a reader in the classroom from elementary into my early years of college, reading meant dissecting the text to find the answers to questions, respond to a prompt and write a book report or summary of the text. This literature experience drew a line between the reader and the text. I found reading to be disconnected to my reading of the texts and stories. The book or texts explored instead served a purpose for finding specific pieces of information or key details, rather than making connections to the text or questioning it. Louise Rosenblatt (1965) states that literature is an exploration, "The difference is that instead of trying to superimpose routine patterns, the teacher will help students develop

these understandings in the context of their own emotions and their own curiosity about life and literature” (p. 63).

Rosenblatt’s work became another layer of understanding the reading that I had not seen before. Reading can be an experience. Rosenblatt (1978) talks about transaction which she references to John Dewey being the first to come up with that term and states that both the reader and the text work together to create the poem. Rosenblatt (1978) states that the reader for most of the reading experience has been neglected:

*In surveying these changes, I find it helpful to visualize a little scene: on a darkened stage I see the figures of the author and the reader, with the book—the text of the poem or play or novel—between them. The spotlight focuses on one of them so brightly that the others fade into practical invisibility. Throughout the centuries, it becomes apparent, usually either the book or the author has received major illumination. The reader has tended to remain in shadow, taken for granted, to all intents and purposes invisible. (p.1)*

Rosenblatt (1978) reclaims the relationship between the reader, the text, and the poem, stating that all three work together collectively to construct a meaningful reading experience. She adds that every experience is unique to the relationship among the three. Not only are the three creating an experience, but a response is also being constructed in that process. Rosenblatt (1978) expresses, “ Even as we are generating the work of art, we are reacting to it” (p. 48). That new understanding of literacy, something that was absent in my reading experiences at Las Mariposas growing up, became a crucial component in my decision making as a teacher and researcher. Louise Rosenblatt’s theory on the literary experience gave me the tools to reconstruct my approach to teaching literacy in the classroom and creating literary experiences for students.

As I delved more and more into Rosenblatt’s work, I began to see literacy more critically in which reading could be an experience, not just for learning or for enjoyment, but to respond and think critically about issues that are important to the reader. This led me to the work of Paulo

Freire (1970) and Gordon Pradl (1996). First, Gordon Pradl's work allowed me to see the power of literacy and how literature can be in partnership with promoting democracy. Pradl (1996) stresses:

*Thus, when we come to consider the kinds of talk about literature that might happen in school, it will be important to consider the patterns of exchange that are enacted and how self-determination is encouraged for individual readers, even as they are testing their responses and interpretations on each other. If the tensions of democracy are not openly on display in the literature classroom, students will continue to learn that their meanings are more properly controlled by others. (p. 9)*

Pradl's words on how literature can be a pathway for educators to construct a democratic space for students helped me to see the powerful role that literature can play in the classroom when teachers create spaces for students to share and think deeply about specific issues or events that can be experienced through literature. Pradl's work influenced my decision making in my approach to selecting books and creating spaces for literature to be explored by students. I chose books based on the meaningful discussions these books invite readers to think deeply about. As I approached the design for the research to take place, I considered both Rosenblatt's and Pradl's work in selecting the books and constructing a timeline for the books to be read. This permitted me to deeply think about the small text sets I would create with the books and how the books could be paired and explored with small groups.

Rosenblatt's theory on transaction led me to incorporate reading strategies that would invite readers to transact with the texts, instead of summarizing or finding my meaning. Rather, students could engage in reading the books and share their transactions with each other. Pradl's work influenced my decision making in selecting the books that students would explore and how I would analyze the discussions, as I reminded myself to provide space for the students' voices to



evolve on their own and create spaces for democracy to take form in which everyone would have the opportunity to share, reflect, think, and question.

Pradl's work connected me to Paulo Freire's theories about taking a stance. As an educator who has had past experiences of being silenced in the classroom, Freire and other theorists I explored before my journey in approaching the dissertation study, created a passion for me as an educator to promote spaces for students to take action. Freire (1970) states, "On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it" (p.39).

This influenced my decision making as a teacher as I walked around the room and facilitated discussions. Paulo Freire (1970) was a reminder that as an educator, I must provide children with opportunities to share instead of trying to serve the teacher with the right answers. Freire helped me to see my role as an educator and gave me an awareness of the power structures that are sometimes put in place in the classroom. The teacher does indeed have power. Yet, when the teacher becomes aware of that power, the educator can make decisions to construct spaces where children hold powerful stances and positions while sharing with each other.

As I became immersed in theories around literacy and literature and began to see reading through a different lens, I incorporated my lens as a Latina to the literary experience and thought about what that meant. For me, literacy can also be an invitation to the exploration and experience of one's cultural identities so that readers can see themselves and aspects of their culture that they may have never thought about intently before. Paulo Freire (1970) adds, "Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and actions upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as being who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (p. 84).

This theory influenced my work as an educator and my approach to this dissertation as I thought about how I would promote a space for change and transformation for myself and students. What will we see throughout our journey through this exploration of books and themes? How would those themes then create meaning for us? Freire (1970) describes,

*In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p.83)*

Once again, Freire's view on problem-posing education became a crucial component in my decision making as an educator. His theory allowed me to think about my stance as a teacher as I thought about myself as a mediator in the transformation of students. How could I support students? What opportunities could I create with students to form a learning environment for transformation? Transformation comes from seeing things in a different way and understanding who one is and how those roles play into lived experiences. It comes from reflection on these experiences.

Freire's work on reflection, transformation, and action really influenced my decision making as I sought to provide spaces for students to create those experiences within their dialogue of the texts and beyond that. For me, Freire's description of the five aspects of dialogue influenced how I would see, listen, understand, reflect and think about the students' dialogue. Paulo Freire (1970) states that dialogue requires love, humility, faith, mutual trust, and hope (p. 91). Without those key components, dialogue cannot exist. This informed me as a teacher because it allowed me to step back and think about my voice as the educator. How can I promote dialogue in the classroom that speaks true to students? How can I as an educator take a step back and find ways to invite student dialogue?

Within the frame of Freire's dialogue, I began to think about the work of Luis Moll, Norma González, and Cathy Amanti (2005) on funds of knowledge. As the theories intertwined and built off one another to shape my approach and decision making as a teacher, I wanted to inform myself on how I could use these theories to invite students' experiences and knowledge into the classroom. Luis Moll et. al, (2005), state:

*Our analysis suggests that within these contexts, much of the teaching and learning is motivated by the children's interests and questions in contrast to classrooms, knowledge is obtained by the children, not imposed by the adults. This totality of experiences, the cultural structuring of the households, whether related to work or play, whether they take place individually, with peers, or under the supervision of adults, helps constitute the funds of knowledge children bring to school. (p. 75)*

This theory on funds of knowledge became an influence in my decision making as I selected books. Which books would allow students to connect, but also encourage children to express their own funds of knowledge? It also helped me to think about the literature discussion strategies I planned to use, such as graffiti boards, sketch to stretch, and written responses. How could those strategies support students in bringing in their funds of knowledge? These strategies did help because teachers do not direct student interpretations, instead, as readers, students transact and experience the books in their own ways, while at the same time bringing in their stories such as Brianna talking about her experience as a refugee.

Freire (1970) remind us that teachers shouldn't pour knowledge into students. Students are not blank slates that need to be filled with information, instead, students hold their own funds of knowledge from their experiences and homes and they bring in learning to the classroom space. Moll, Gonzalez, and Amanti (2005) share ways in which teachers can bring in funds of knowledge into the classroom, for example, making home visits. Although I did not make home visits, the home instead was invited into the classroom as students shared family stories and

experiences. Towards the end of the study many families thanked me for giving students these opportunities, they valued and appreciated that. Luis Moll et.al (2005) state, “A ripple effect also occurs—the teacher, to some extent, is more sensitive to all the children and their parents, even if there has not been a direct home visit” (p.147).

As a result of learning about the theories and practices around funds of knowledge, I felt compelled to promote opportunities for students to share about what they already knew and the stories they valued and carried with them. Funds of knowledge influenced my decision making in that sense. I felt compelled to hear student voices and stories and as the students and I shared with each other, our relationship as a class grew. We felt connected to each other and this allowed me in many ways to become a listener and a participant as I found myself connecting to students and their stories.

Funds of knowledge brought me to the theories around culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining pedagogies. First, I turned to culturally responsive pedagogy as discussed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009). Her theory on responding to students in the classroom built another layer for me, as my decision in becoming a better educator is to best serve the needs and experiences students bring and want to share with the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2009) states, “When schools support their culture as an integral part of the school experience, students can understand that academic excellence is not the sole province of white middle-class students” (p.12).

The focus of Ladson-Billings on culturally responsive pedagogy talks about teachers taking positions to encourage and build spaces for students of color to see themselves in education. When curriculum and teaching is constructed in a way that invites students of all background to see themselves in the curriculum or in education, students thrive. They feel

connected, appreciated, and valued. For me, being culturally responsive was a central component into my decision making as the classroom consisted of Latinx students. As a Latina myself, I too wanted to create a space where we as a Latinx community could come together, read, think, discuss, reflect, and transform. So, as I collected books and looked through various webpages to find literature to incorporate into the classroom from a Latinx standpoint, it became meaningful that the discussions or spaces students would be invited to partake in, would also invite the stories and values that students bring with them. When students have spaces such as these, they feel valued especially coming from the institution. Ladson-Billings (2009) states,

*The ultimate goal is to ensure that they have a sense of ownership of their knowledge—a sense that it is empowering and liberating. As coconstructors in the knowledge-building process, they are less alienated from it and begin to understand that learning is an important cultural activity. (p.84)*

Teachers co-construct with students the experiences in the classroom. Students and teachers work together to think, reflect, question, and act on issues explored in the classroom. For this study, that purpose became rooted in my heart. My purpose as both an educator and researcher is to reveal and reclaim the value that students bring into the educational community from their lives outside of school. Students are not empty vessels; students have knowledge and it is through the collaboration of the educator and students that a piece of art is made and education takes on a whole new perspective.

After reading about culturally relevant pedagogy, I came upon the term culturally responsive pedagogy. Geneva Gay (2018) talked about culturally responsive pedagogy, where not only are the materials or resources used in the classroom relevant to students, but responsive, meaning the materials, resources, and education experiences respond to the needs of the students. In other words, culturally responsive pedagogy is teaching that responds to the calls of students. Geneva Gay (2018) states:

*Culturally diverse people also need to be culturally responsive to each other. This involves being open, receptive, and respectful to the viewpoints, thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of self and others, including a willingness to critique them; learning from and relating to members of one's own and other cultures, races, ethnicities, and social classes, exploring and honoring the differences of self and others; recognizing that people view the world and life through different lenses; and actively promoting equality and social justice. (p. 45)*

This became a meaningful process in my approach and design of the research as a teacher researcher because it gave me perspective on my own lens and the lens students bring to the classroom. It allowed me to be open as an educator to students' stories and experiences. In education, many times, teachers are required to teach certain curricula. The time frame may not allow for a space for students to share their stories or thinking and so education may fall back into a more traditional approach. The teacher can easily teach and pour information on students, yet teaching, good teaching, is more than just a direct pouring of knowledge onto students. Genuine teaching involves everyone. Good teachers ask open-ended questions that lead students to research or explore. Good teaching happens when teachers help students find who they are and learn about the world through different lens.

Therefore, it was important for me to read the theories as I began constructing my approach to the dissertation because I wanted to pair pedagogy with theory and I wanted to incorporate those values of good teaching into my study. I didn't want to create a study that didn't have a purpose or meaning. I wanted to build this dissertation and my teaching practices to be responsive to the students in the classroom.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy became an important piece as I thought about how I, as a Latina teacher, can be culturally sustaining for Latinx students. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017) state: "What are we seeking to sustain through CSP? The simple, perhaps taken-for-granted assumption behind the development of CSP is: we sustain what we love" (p. 12).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy as an extension of culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy taught me that we not only seek to be relevant and responsive, but sustaining to the needs and experiences of students. Paris and Alim (2017) add,

*We believe that CSP, like all critical asset-based approaches, is at heart about survival—a survival we want to sustain through education—and about changing the conditions under which we live and work by opening up new and revitalizing community rooted ways of thinking about education beyond, as Morrison remind us “the White gaze” (p.13)*

Growing up at Las Mariposas Elementary as a student, I had not approached a book that reflected my cultural identity. I didn’t even know they existed, until graduate school when I read books that reflected my culture and other cultures in ways that I had never thought or seen before. This new understanding paired with culturally sustaining pedagogy allowed me to think about my approach to teaching as an opportunity to create those powerful experiences for students so that they are able to see themselves in the literature and see others as well. So, when I was selecting books around Latinx issues or perspectives on Latinx issues I kept in mind my experiences as a Latina and thinking about the students’ experiences.

As I read these theories, there was one last theory that I did revisit, and it became an influence in my decision making. John Dewey(1938) was an influential factor in my teaching as he allowed me to think about the overall general role of education. Dewey (1938) states:

*What we want and need is education pure and simple, and we shall make surer and faster progress when we devote ourselves to finding out just what education is and what conditions have to be satisfied in order that education maybe a reality and not a name or a slogan. It is for this reason alone that I have emphasized the need for a sound philosophy of experience. (p.91)*

John Dewey reminded me that education isn’t constrained to books and answering questions from a textbook. Instead, education is an opportunity and experience where students and teacher can join together to create powerful learning opportunities. As I sought to approach

my own teaching and this study, I wanted to create a space where students were not writing book reports or dissecting the text to find answers but could see themselves as valuable tools in the learning we were creating as a class. I wanted to create experiences that wouldn't last for hours, but that students would remember for a lifetime and carry with them even after the study was done. The education that I sought to approach as the educator and that I continue to seek is one in which every story is valued, recognized, and heard and where the community can rise up and feel recognized and appreciated. Students can see their own values and empower each other to continue to strive.

Theory and practice go hand in hand. Without theory there is no practice and without practice there cannot be theory. Both must work together as theory allows teachers to take steps forward into constructing their pedagogies. At the same time, the teacher's pedagogies provide a means to teachers to step back and revisit theories to inform them on how to most effectively approach the role of education in the lives of every student.

### **Theoretical Influences on My Decision Making As A Teacher**

The theoretical influences that helped approach my teaching also was an important influence throughout the course of the study. The next section of this chapter shares how theories informed my practice during the study by looking at my weekly memos, which serve as a primary data in this analysis. Following the exploration of my primary data, my teacher reflection journal notes, which served as my secondary data are explored to examine how the theories came to flourish during the study. I share examples from the weekly memos paired with ways in which I experienced the theoretical frames taking form within the study.



As a teacher-researcher, I also reflect on the district mandates and school requirements as many of those outside factors became constraints in the study in the next section. The weekly memos and teacher reflection notes are incorporated to share how theories may have been restricted or excluded because of those factors. However, there were also factors that allowed the theories to serve as an extension of student discussions, which are also be shared.

Weekly memos served as an opportunity for me as a teacher-researcher to reflect on the process of going through the planning, construction, and living of the research. At the same time, it provided an opportunity to reflect on myself as an educator and how I was incorporating theories and pedagogy into the classroom. One of the most rewarding experiences of having weekly memos is that the memos were written at the time and place in which the research was taking place. The data stands true to my perspectives on the real experiences and events that were taking place at that time, not on my reflections back on these experiences.

The theories on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies became the heartbeat of this study. In culturally responsive pedagogy, Gloria Ladson-Billings ( 2009) talks about the value of the educator building spaces for students to see themselves as a valuable asset to the educational environment, through student discussion and questioning. She states, “Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in today’ society” (p. 140).

I reflected about this as I wrote about student questioning in January. The memo was recorded on January 26, 2019, when students discussed about immigration as they read

*Dreamers* and *The Journey*. My memo states:

*As the conversation kept going Valentín and Lupita kept having questions. They asked like: “Why do people cross the border?” to “Why doesn’t Trump and other people accept Mexicans and Hispanics?” to “Why build a wall?” I was amazed. The students were questioning.*

This reflection in the weekly memo is an example of the significance of students questioning. Questioning is a valuable tool in critical thinking, so that students see themselves and the world around them through a different lens. Students have the opportunities to step back and go forward as they analyze and reflect on the issues they find meaningful. The opportunities that students engaged with invited connections to their cultural identities and provided opportunities to bring these connections into discussions. For me, this example from the weekly memos allowed me to appreciate the opportunity I have as a Latina educator to create spaces for Latinx issues to be discussed and questioned, so that students can think and question hegemonic systems and issues around power, racism, and immigration, as was the case in this example. o Paris and Alim (2017) state, “And finally, I learned with students and with Ms. Bee that our stories—when given the opportunity to be drawn and written in educational spaces validate who we are and who we are becoming” (p.113).

When students were invested in the books and in sharing their stories and questioning, they felt a sense of responsibility towards their Latinx community members who face similar experiences on immigration. In my teacher notebook, which served as my secondary data, I noted in January: “It was as if the students were building from each other. Question after question kept coming up. They wanted to understand the issues and the consequences around them. This was evident in the same weekly memo written in January as I added:

*The rest of that morning the students couldn't stop questioning and thinking about immigration. It was then that I asked students to work on another graffiti board. The students worked quietly and I saw amazing images once again. The students were each questioning, reflecting, and making connections to things they knew or had seen.*

Students' reflections and images (see figures 4.9, 4.10, and 4.11) drawn through this dialogue, indicate students' awareness of the power roles played by the border patrol and the

establishment of a border wall. In my weekly memo written January 12, the week before students began questioning and interacting with the books, I noted:

*The students want to reflect they feel empowered and they feel that this allows them to think and really become passionate about something. Although things did not go as planned this week, I saw that passion and I saw that eagerness of the students to want to read and want to write and reflect on the text, which really is just so inspiring as a teacher.*

This is a reminder that when teachers integrate theories into their decision making, fruitful experiences take place. Students feel empowered, engaged, and valued. The weekly memos represented the theories that as a teacher I was seeing come to life. With the books that were selected and paired with culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy, the community feels valued and is strengthened through that dialogue, a reflection of Freire's (1970) and Gay's (2018) theoretical frames. In the memo, written on February 2, I noted,

*They (students) really are thinking and pushing themselves to discuss with each other and with me. That's a definite plus! I am enjoying the conversations and I am seeing the students do too! They love the books as much as I do, and I am seeing a shift in just the environment of the class. I see us building more of a community with each other. We're working together and learning from each other, slowly, but surely.*

The theories on dialogue and community became the core of the dialogue occurring in the classroom. The students felt compelled to treat each other with respect, while at the same time felt the responsibility to grow with each other by sharing their points of view. Freire (1970) states:

*Love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must act other acts of freedom; otherwise it is not love. (p.90)*

One example of this occurring in the classroom was the community building that students were creating. There were times of tension, but when students took the courage to discuss with

each other and share how they felt to one another they were able to learn from each other. This was noted in my teacher journal many times, such as when Lupita and Paula discussed immigration and Paula made a reference to Mexicans being like pitbulls. On January 19, the girls in the classroom had approached me as they felt neglected or mistreated by the boys. The girls in the classroom had come together to enact a strike as they held a poster that read “we are equal too”. In my memo, I noted:

*One of the girls initiated what she called a “strike”. She and the rest of my girls in the class, totaling 6 of them asked if they could speak in front of the class to say why they wanted to strike or protest. The girls wrote in 6 different blank pieces of copy paper the following words: “Girls deserve to be treated with kindness” and another poster with the words: “We are equal too”. It was like a mini- “me too” movement, and I was actually very proud and scared too because I did not know how the boys would react, much less if this was appropriate, but I did not say no to the girls and surely when the class was together, the girls quietly stood up holding their posters as the girl who took initiative Ally stated: “boys and Lili (who identifies as queer) we want you to know that we girls deserve respect”. The boys and Lili were surprised, one wanted to shout at the girls. I let Ally say what she needed to say and how she and her other peers Anna had been felt “bullied”.*

This example from the weekly memo reminded me that the space belongs to the students so they can take initiatives to make changes, and these changes start in the classroom. It was interesting, because the girls had made the choice and felt compelled to stand up for themselves. Freire (1970) talked about the problem-posing educator, and how educators should allow spaces for students to speak up and make change as problem-posers themselves. Through that dialogue both girls and boys talked about issues that extended beyond the book being read and took action on the issues occurring in the classroom. In the memo, I added:

*I finally spoke up and did not take a side, but instead recognized that boys might also feel the same way. I stated the “golden rule” and said, that both boys and girls need to be treated equally in the class and both boys and girls need to feel respected. On Wednesday, we took the time to re-connect with each other and build strong relationships between boys and girls and Lili who identified as queer, to see that we should all be treated with respect. “This means a lot to us” Ally stated. “We need to feel like we can be*

*treated equally” María (pseudonym) added. “Us too” said Carlos (pseudonym). I smiled seeing the agreement between all groups. “Me too!” Lili added, as she has often been called a boy or a girl and doesn’t really know her place yet (who she identifies herself with). I smiled. We didn’t get to the actual small groups on Wednesday, but we did make progress and we mended some bonds in the classroom.*

As an educator, this is a reminder that education is not just about completing tasks but genuine teaching is taking a step back in order to take a step forward. The girls who had explored issues around the Latinx community also felt that there needed to be a “take a stand” moment in the current classroom environment. It was through respect and dialogue that students achieved that space, what Freire (1970) refers to as that of love.

Students’ interactions with the books as described in the weekly memos represented the pulse of the theoretical frames coming to life and thriving throughout the classroom setting, not just during the study but beyond the study. One important event was noted in the weekly memos as students explored the power of storytelling. This memo was recorded again, January 19,

*Sahid’s statement gave me the chills as he talked about this “used to be a free kingdom”. It made me think about what I see in the news and wonder if the kiddos have seen this too in the news. The students were saddened and could relate. I walked to another table as one boy eagerly raised his hand and said: “Miss my dad crossed the border illegally.” He continued “he crossed with his best friend. The border patrol had seen both my dad and his friend and was running towards them. My dad’s best friend said ‘run’ and gave his life for my dad as his best friend was shot. My dad ran and ran and got hide. He came over, but he never saw his friend again” “That is so sad. I am so sorry” I said. It made me go numb to think about this and just how much my boy’s dad had kept his legacy and his friend’s memory alive in his now son. In other words, passing on stories of crossing the border.*

Through that dialogue between Sahid and Manuel, Manuel felt compelled to share his father’s story. This dialogue reminded me of the power of storytelling in the classroom.

Rosenblatt (1965), states that: “Books can be a liberating influence in many ways. They may reveal to the boy and girl that there can be modes of life different from the ones into which they have happened to be born” (p. 185).

For Manuel and Sahid, this experience was fruitful as the story Manuel shared and the comment Sahid made allowed the boys to learn about each other and bring real world experiences and stories into what they were reading to make sense of the issue. Rosenblatt adds: “Reflection on the literary experience between a reexperiencing, a reenacting, of the work-as-evoked, and an ordering and elaborating of our response to it” (p.134).

As seen in the memo, the students took these literary invitations as pathways into sharing how these books created meaning for them. In my journal I added, “They transmitted that meaning through the dialogue and storytelling to their peers to think critically together about those experiences and how those experiences impact them directly.” In addition, the books invited a love of literature for the students. In one memo I noted how the students had clapped and cheered as we got to the end of the novel *Becoming Naomi León*, on February 9. Students clearly felt empowered to find value and meaning in their cultures, stories, and perspectives.

In the week of February 9, right after reading *Becoming Naomi Leon*, Lili, a student who identified as queer, made the decision to come out. This experience meant a lot to Lili. It was indeed a reminder that literature can create powerful experiences for students to think about who they are as they think critically about the world around them. In a space where the classroom was growing as a community, students were growing as individuals. I noted this in my weekly memo:

*Later this Tuesday, as we got into the day, Lili had an important announcement. She said that Naomi inspired her to be brave in the book Becoming Naomi Leon and so she wanted to be brave and come out as gay. “Miss I’m gay” she said one afternoon. At the beginning of the year, she had spoken with me asking me if I were heterosexual or homosexual and she had said she was queer because she was still figuring out who she was, but this Tuesday, she felt brave and more secure in her identity and she was brave just like Naomi.*

As an educator, seeing her growth as an individual is rewarding and a reminder of why I became a teacher. The experiences and relationships built in the classroom were transforming

children. When students are invited to engage with literature and bring their stories and themselves into the engagements in the classroom with literature, students become empowered as they create new experiences and points of view. They evolve as human beings in their own way through interactions with literacy and their community. In my journal I added, “Students were seeing themselves differently, they found value in who they were because of those experiences to dialogue.” John Dewey (1938) talks about experience, stating:

*“Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had. (p. 39)”*

As I thought about how Dewey’s theory on experience was evolving in the classroom, it allowed me the opportunity to realize that experience does not have a single factor, nor is it a single result. Experience is diverse and dynamic and requires multiple interactions so as the individual and the world around them shifts and expands to create something new.

While Lili was sharing her gender identity, students like Romero were exploring their economic identities. As students explored more books, they talked about money as a factor in immigration. In one conversation, students talked about the American Dream and students shared reasons for people crossing into the United States. Many came up with money and finding a better job as a reason for people to immigrate to a country.

This conversation led us to look at the poverty cycle, social class, and mathematics to talk about budget, spending, careers, financial income, debt and bills. I wrote about a powerful experience that took these conversations beyond literature as students thought about real world problems. They posed questions such as, “how do we get out of poverty?” and “why is it that certain people have better economic stances than others?” As we explored this in March, they researched the relationship between ethnic background and high paying jobs. Student noted that

Latinx communities don't obtain a high percentage of high paying jobs. Students were upset and thoughtful as they shared their feelings.

What was meaningful about this experience was that it was student driven and student led. The students took the initiative to learn more about their communities in the United States by looking at professions and economic relations. In the week of March 9, the students and I took a trip to the Cooper Center in Tucson, as students eagerly anticipated in learning about the Sonoran Desert environment.

On the bus on our way there, students observed homes along the way and had conversations about the American Dream and hard work.

*"Ms. Serrano, do you think I will get to live in a house like that one day". I look at him, and really look at him and say: "Of course you will Romero, you will have one of these big houses one day. And I will be your neighbor living somewhere near you where we will have barbeques and we will remember where it all started". I smiled. "Wow!" he gasps looking all around to those beautiful houses. My parents used to and still do, drive me and my siblings around the nice neighborhoods. "You will have a house like this one day" my mom would say and still does, I shared with him. "Miss who lives in these houses?" Romero asks pulling at my sleeve. "Hard working people Romero. People who went to school and studied hard, they became teachers, professors, lawyers, doctors, you name it!" I said. "Wow!" he gasped again. "All it takes Romero is a book, a determined mind, and all of your strength and passion to do well in school and little by little, you will have a house like this" I said as he looked at me and the houses leading up to the Cooper Center. "Wow!" he gasped. "Okay we're here" the bus driver said. "Miss, Miss did you see the houses?" Lili and Carlos ask. "Yeah, that was nice huh?" I said. "yeah" they responded.*

This is a memorable snapshot of our experience throughout the study, because the literature discussions led students beyond the classroom. These classroom discussions led us to real world experiences on our way to a field trip. The students saw the homes and the importance and value in obtaining an American Dream and rethinking their positions. Pradl (1996) states, "For development and change to occur, I must see the text as more than information, reading as



more than decoding. Then I can frame the text as the irritant, a grain of sand in the oyster's home" (p. 26).

The weekly memos and teacher journal notes served as an example of how theory and practice work interchangeably as the theory informed the work that was being done in the classroom, as well as the practices in the classroom helping to develop the theory. Literature is a partner to experience and transformations occurring within and throughout the reader and reading community. Although many have different transactions from the texts being read and explored, those experiences are shared through dialogue, and it is through dialogue and critical thinking that students feel the need to reflect, observe, search, explore, experience, and transform. Literature shakes us up as readers, it opens our eyes. Literature allows the inner consciousness to speak up and forces readers to reflect so that readers, like the students in this study, can move forward as learners and human beings.

As the study approached April and May, the community in the classroom transformed my relationship with students and vice versa. Interestingly, there were many events that occurred inside and outside the literature discussions that played into that growth. Many of those experiences were negative. For instance, students had arguments with each other, and some became rebellious towards power figures in school. For example, students questioned the principal's intentions in observing teachers and approaching students. One student got in trouble for breaking the school's safety policy. Through those experiences we were able to have conversations about taking responsibility through our knowledge and questions.

As we went through this process of growth, we became aware of our words and actions. At the same time, we gained awareness that schools and education may have not yet changed into providing opportunities for students and teachers to apply theories for effective practice.

This was something we saw lacking, whereas in the classroom the application of theories, practices, and community-building was enriched.

Through those experiences, the students and I built strong relationships and a sense of community where theorists that framed my approach to this study led me to construct spaces for rich literature discussions, and culturally diverse experiences for students. As an example, I turn to the final weekly memo reflection that I wrote on May 25. I wrote:

*Then the bell rang. It was quiet. No one was really moving. "Okay" I said looking at them as they were packing their things but kind of stalling. "I'm going to miss you guys" I said crying. I grabbed each one of them, gave them a blessing, a kiss on the cheek and told them that I loved them and they were going to make a difference...*

*For 180 days you build this strong relationship and then you have to let them go...*

*Even though we didn't finish I guess the message is that research isn't always a full complete product, it's more of a process, something that I wasn't able to finish of course, but I can continue to do in the coming years and those reading my work can continue to do themselves. Yes, this week was the end, the end of a chapter, the end of a season, the end of a classroom relationship (I have built with for the last 2 years), but it is also a beginning to something else. Like the kaleidoscope there is no complete product, the image changes over time and keeps on going. Research, theories, keep on going, we will never get a "the end"...*

The year ended with a powerful experience as we embraced the experiences shared throughout the year. These experiences through the literature discussions and other learning experiences went beyond the classroom to indicate how powerful the voice of the Latinx community is, especially when Latinx children have spaces to share their knowledge in the classroom.

I'd like for the light of this journey to be on a Latinx community that has struggled, strived, and transformed together with me. I want to share that in the memos and teacher notebook entries where I reflected on many of the theorists that I incorporated into my pedagogy to create both successful practices and failures. Pedagogy and theory worked together

interchangeably in my decision-making as a teacher. Within that journey, the most powerful result in that experience has been the relationships built with students and the endless opportunities we had as a Latinx community to invite spaces for critical thinking, questioning, reflecting, and growth around issues that mattered to us. Lili, one of the students whom I had built a strong relationship, looked me in the eyes on that last day and I could feel her speak to me as a human, as an educator, and as a Latina. Her eyes were a reminder that there is hope and knowledge in the world, and as I looked back, the theories became more acts of love; a resemblance of true teaching. The heart of pedagogy and theories lies within students and the relationships teachers make to build a learning community along with them. Thus, theories and pedagogy work interchangeably as both inform each other through this process of transformation. In my last teacher journal entry, I wrote about how much I was going to miss them:

*“As I went into the classroom one last time to clean the empty room, I looked towards the desks that now lay empty. Countless opportunities and memories of relationships built within those desks. I miss them. They meant more than students to me. They became family and hope for a better future. As I shut down the lights one last time, I felt grateful, grateful for the opportunity to have had this experience with these students”.*

### **External Factors that Impacted Theory and Decision Making in the Classroom**

Throughout the course of the study, there were external factors that influenced my planning and decision making as a teacher, often as limitations. In this section, those factors that influenced my planning are explored as I share events that occurred in the classroom as a negative influence. The factors played a crucial role as they limited my enactment of theory and, at the same time, caused me to reflect on the current education system.

In addition, these factors returned me to thinking about theories and how theories and their application and inviting theory to inform pedagogy, can be challenged. These external

factors were also reminders that theories can grow and extend beyond the classroom and into the lives of students and teachers, when educators are reflective.

### **District and School Requirements**

Throughout the course of the study, the school district implemented guided reading district wide. The district moved to guided reading as an extension of the reading block, where students would be tested on their reading levels and teachers were required to work with students at their level by supporting students with reading strategies to improve their reading achievement.

At Las Mariposas Elementary, this requirement was implemented extensively. Teachers were trained in guided reading in August and were required to test students on their reading levels at the beginning of the school year, in December, and in March. For some teachers, the school mandated that the children be tested every month to see if they had progressed. This was imposed on the K-3 classrooms and classrooms showing the majority of students below grade level. Due to my classroom being an SEI mixed class with the majority of the students being English Language Learners, guided reading implementation and the assessment of guided reading levels were required monthly.

The guided reading block in the classroom, at the time of the study, occurred for about an hour to two hours. Guided reading was required to be done daily, especially for students who ranged at the lower level. Due to this implementation, the school had a Curriculum Specialist, named Mrs. Arvizo, who would come in daily to observe my implementation of guided reading. During the last five months of school, from January to May (the time of the study) Mrs. Arvizo came in every single day.

This limited my teacher-research as many times she came in during the scheduled time block for the literature discussions. She'd ask to see my lesson plans to observe what the students and I were doing. This constant observation and interruption led me to redirect my lessons to fit the needs of the school and district mandates, limited the amount of time students could participate in the literature discussions, including days where we could not do any discussions. Going back to my teacher memos, I counted 150 times that my principal Mrs. Benitez or Mrs. Arvizo entered the classroom. About a total of four weeks, both the principal and the curriculum specialist, came in twice a day, twice a week. I noted in my teacher journal:

*It has been a total of five days this week and all week the principal and Mrs. Arvizo have been in my room. They came in twice a day even, once on Tuesday and once on Friday. This interrupted my literature discussions as they came in with laptops on hand for observation.*

I also noted this constant observation and frequent interruptions in my weekly memos, mentioned about 75 percent of the time in my memos for those 20 weeks. In the first week, January 12, I noted:

*I read 3 chapters of the text because Mrs. Arvizo came in earlier this time, and we were unable to read or draw about the book as she asked to see my lesson plans and asked if she could start modeling for me earlier because she was the principal of the day since Mrs. Benitez was at a principal meeting, and Mrs. Arvizo was going to have to take care of students at lunch time*

The observations were constant. As I noted multiple times: "I was monitored that whole morning", "Mrs. Benitez walked in", "I was asked for my lesson plans", "She asked to see my lesson" and "Just when we were getting into our literature discussions, she walked in". The observations reflected the frustration faced when theory and practice are not given room to grow and build. In other words, the new practices and pedagogies that one gains as a teacher can't flourish when other factors contradict those purposes.

For example, there was an incident where the students were working in small group discussions. The students read to each other and then they discussed what they were reading as they worked on their graffiti boards. During the literature discussion circles, Mrs. Arvizo came in and observed the classroom environment. As she looked around her view of what was going on conflicted with her theory and practice of literacy. My memo on March 2, says,

*“Ms Serrano, what are your students doing?” Mrs. Arvizo our reading specialist looked at me and I could tell she was puzzled. “We are doing literature discussions” I said. She looks around the room, where some of my kiddos are about to talk and I can see Lili trying to hide the voice recorder. “I am doing this for my dissertation” I said (since she knew I was doing graduate work at the University). “I just want to recommend something” she said. “okay?” I asked. “I think you should have the students seated by levels and have them read books at their level. Because what I’m seeing here is that these kids are talking, and they are not concentrated. See there is side talk over there and they are not talking to each other about the book.” She said. I looked at Paulo (pseudonym) table and saw the boys talking. I didn’t pick up on what though. “I would also suggest that you get 4 copies of each book instead. You can get it from the scholastic book room, and then have students write something, and then you give them 10 minutes at the end to talk about what they read and you tie it to the standard.”*

Another example of this was when the principal came to address student behavior. Students were arranged into small groups to engage in literature discussion strategies, but she changed the seating arrangement to rows. This made it very difficult for literature discussions to take place because students were not sitting in groups to freely discuss books. In the classroom students’ voices were valuable and as an educator, I wanted students to share; however her definition of a productive classroom meant something different. I noted in my memo the week of April 6,

*I guess I was furious because of the seating arrangement the most and the loss of time. I needed them to stay in groups and I wanted them to stay in groups, it’s part of our discussions. I didn’t want this change of plans. I didn’t go asking for them and I didn’t need her to do that to our classroom.*

These examples indicate the conflicting theoretical understandings that educators within a school can hold and influence pedagogical approaches. These examples are a few of many

instances where the theoretical approaches of the staff differed from my own understandings. These examples also serve as a reminder that an educator who holds different beliefs than a school may struggle because there is no common ground for speaking about those teaching philosophies. It comes to show that theories can live in complex and constant clash as a group of educators construct their own pedagogical approaches.

During the course of the study, the school also implemented a data approach to learning. Teachers were required to assess students weekly using formative assessments for both math and English language arts (ELA). The data was closely monitored, and teachers were required to implement re-teaching schedules. The school used a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. This meant that about 75 to 80 percent of students needed to pass the formative assessment given on Friday. If that was not met, teachers were required to re-teach so that students could pass that standard or skill being taught that week.

Due to this expectation, teachers were required to create formative assessments each week paired with lesson plans to those standards and strategies that were being assessed. As a result, teachers were pulled out weekly for one hour to plan with Mrs. Arvizo and Mrs. Benitez to discuss data, assessments, and student growth.

The amount of work and planning required for data driven teaching conflicted with my pedagogy and the theoretical frame to encourage students as learners. Students saw themselves in these engagements and shared their stories, life experiences, thoughts and reflections to build community with each other including their teacher. However, when there is a model that promotes data, teachers could easily find themselves returning to the banking model, where teachers dump information into the minds of students, rather than encourage them to bring their current knowledge and understandings to the classroom.

This affected my study in many ways as I was pulled out weekly from the classroom to look at data and lesson planning. I was monitored daily on my teaching and lesson planning to follow the RTI model rather than my philosophy of education. This limited our literature discussions due to the observations and frequent pull outs for training were taking place. The amount of pressure on test-taking also took a toll on time for literature discussions because teachers found themselves questioned on data results.

The data was a constant reminder to teach to the test and move away from other means of teaching and so I shortened the amount of time or pushed the literature discussions off for certain number of days to address the data and the tests.

For weeks, students were drilled on preparation for the AZmerit tests, our state mandated test, and literature discussions were placed on the back burner. For the school, acquiring high test scores was the goal, especially in reading as the school was required to enforce a strict 2 hour reading block to improve reading test scores. As a result to the AZmerit and test pressure, I found myself teaching to the test to achieve positive results. Beginning in early March to late April, students found their day driven by test preparation. In addition to AZmerit in April, in March, the district tested students before the end of quarter 3, which is termed as a quarter benchmark. The benchmark is used to assess the standards addressed during the nine weeks of each quarter. Since the third quarter was coming to an end, the students were required to prepare for that test, and soon after, prepare for the AZmerit. In my teacher journal I noted, in March 30,

*The past few weeks have been non-stop drilling on testing. From teaching math and reading extensively to trying to implement literature discussions, I am noting student frustration and stress. I don't blame them. I'm feeling the stress myself. This emphasis on testing doesn't speak to the needs and experiences of students. In fact, tests, test student ability and that can be intimidating.*

Collecting data and assessing can be productive, but when that's all education is reduced to only this focus much is lost, especially an emphasis on students as human beings. The purpose



of education is to bring students into the classroom as they are and to share with each other our stories, viewpoints, and reflections. Freire (1970) states,

*Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are (p.72).*

Although the theoretical frame that I was implementing in the classroom was limited, the challenge for me as a teacher was my responsibility to reflect and find space for what I find meaningful. These experiences caused me to understand that I am not just an educator, but an ally for students. As the relationships and experiences were challenged, it was through those interactions that we became immersed in powerful experiences that built and brought the classroom community together. As a Latina with Latinx students working together, nothing became impossible.

We also had two field trips, which made our literature discussions shorter, as well as fire drills held twice during the study with a lock down and bus evacuation. In addition to those school procedures, I had two trainings to attend on assessing students and my grandmother's unexpected passing. Student promotions were also around the corner, so in May we spent time planning, prepping, and rehearsing for the promotion. As a teacher, my decision making around these events led to shortening literature discussions or rescheduling them on days I was absent from work. As a result, there were a couple of novels that were not explored, and some literature discussions were condensed to a shorter period of time.

### **Social and Personal Factors in Children's Lives**

Students brought a lot of themselves into the classroom. There were many social and personal factors students brought to the work that also influenced my decision making as a

teacher researcher. One example is an incident with Paula as we read *Becoming Naomi Leon* in January. On January 26, Paula confronted me with her feelings towards reading the novel. I noted in both my teacher journal and weekly memo:

*“Miss Serrano can I talk to you?” she asked. “Yes Paula” “Privately” she said. We headed into the hallway. “Miss I don’t want to tell you, but...I’m scared, I told the girls, they said I should tell you” “What is it Paula you can tell me anything” I said. “Well miss...” She gasped and then she started to cry and placed her hands in her face. “Paula are you okay?” I asked placing my hand on her shoulder. “It’s just” she said crying very loudly and her voice high pitched. “I don’t like the book we are reading right now” “oh” I gasped. “I don’t like it miss Serrano, it reminds me of my dad” she gasped. “He’s an alcoholic” she cried. She kept crying and crying. “He’s been doing bad things Miss Serrano...”*

This situation forced me to step back and think about where this study was heading and if this work was bringing in discomfort. As I re-evaluated my decision making and indicated that I would support her and we could read another book instead. Paula decided in the middle of the day that she wanted to know what would happen next. She wanted to see what the character, Naomi, would do with her mother who is also an alcoholic in the book. This opportunity allowed Paula and I to talk privately about alcoholism and family dynamics, giving Paula tools to approach herself and her family.

It was through Paula’s decision to continue reading the novel that Lili was able to come out, because she was inspired by Naomi for being brave in the book. For Lili sharing her identity in the classroom was a powerful step. Her actions also led me to engage the class in LGBTQ+ books and talk about gender identity, instead of the planned literature discussions. This led students to appreciate each other and the class was open to Lili’s identity. They valued her and her voice. This was recorded in the weekly memos on February 9, , where I shared Lili’s approach to coming out and my approach to building acceptance in the community by having

conversations with children and exploring LGBTQ+ literature. In my teacher journal that day, I noted:

*Lili was so happy today to finally be who she knows she is. The best part of it all is the classroom's immediate response of acceptance. They empowered her and most of all she feels safe. She knows we are her allies. I am so proud of her.*

Students continued to bring in their personal interests, experiences, and stories into the literature discussion circles which provided opportunities to go beyond the literature discussions. This led us to explore and research financial incomes, look at ethnicity in relation to jobs, and think about the real world through our lens as Latinx people. As an educator, inviting students to be a part of the decision making allowed me to become an ally as we form a Latinx community together through education and literacy. Paris and Alim (2017) state, "It means, then, that those of us who are committed to these kinds of asset-based pedagogies must form alliances, must ourselves be producers, must put ourselves on the line in terms of participating in practice on the ground" (p. 270).

These influences were moments where I was able to place students first as they asked to explore more about what they found meaningful in their identities, ethnicity, culture, and home life. Students used these opportunities to invite growth and community building as they grew stronger not just academically through the critical discussions they were having, but also humanistically as they re-constructed and transformed how they perceived themselves and their world.

### **Connections to Latinx Funds of Knowledge**

Bringing in students' funds of knowledge became a valuable piece in our work as a Latinx community to delve into issues, stories, and experiences that were meaningful in our

interactions with the literature and each other. For students, storytelling about themselves or their families was a reminder that they too hold knowledge that they can share with their peers and teacher.

Rosenblatt (1978) talks about transaction as readers bringing in knowledge from their experiences to the text. She states, “The reader draws on his own internalized culture in order to elicit from the text this world which may differ from his own in many respects” (p.56). Reader’s become aware of the knowledge they carry as much as the perspectives and new knowledge they create and take from the experience. As a teacher-researcher, bringing in students’ funds of knowledge or creating spaces for them to bring their understandings to the discussions was a central goal. Latinx students need to feel invited and encouraged to question and think critically about their communities.

As mentioned earlier, students brought in multiple stories. For instance, when Manuel talked about his father and a friend crossing the border from Mexico to the United States, he shared that his father and friend were approached by the border patrol. Manuel’s father escaped because the friend who crossed with him gave up his life when he was shot by the border patrol. Brianna shared her story of being a refugee as her mother and her siblings crossed from Mexico into the United States, seeking asylum as their family was threatened to be killed if they stayed in Mexico.

Paula’s sharing about her father led to discussions and reflections about alcoholism and gave Paula the opportunity to think about those dynamics in her home. Lili’s sharing her identity led students to explore LGBTQ+ books and issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community and that led students to question and challenge acts of injustice.

Romero's questioning of the American Dream and delving into the poverty cycle while sharing his financial situation as a Latino allowed him to think about hegemony and different social classes in the United States. This led students to talk and research occupations and the relationships of those occupations to ethnic backgrounds, noting that Latinx people fell short of other ethnic backgrounds with high paying jobs.

Students' funds of knowledge, what they already knew and who they were, directed the direction in which the curriculum took, as many of these situations allowed us to dig beyond the literature discussions to pose other questions and do research on them. Luis Moll, et. Al. (2005) stress, "But we also know that children create their own social worlds, with accompanying funds of knowledge, which may be independent from the adults' social life" (p. 279). As Latinx people, we had experienced similar events as well as differing events. As they brought in their funds of knowledge, I learned more about them as they also learned about me. Funds of knowledge, in that sense, is an opportunity for both educators and students to create relationships of learning from each other. In addition, funds of knowledge allow teachers to re-think pedagogy and theory as the work embraces students' lives as humans.

The funds of knowledge shared in our classroom allowed me to think about my decision making as an educator, Norma Gonzalez (2005) states, "As educators, we are urged to be aware of cultural issues and try to incorporate culturally sensitive pedagogy" (p. 29). All students deserve an education that invites who they are and meets their academic and personal needs. As an educator in this process of decision making both throughout, before, and after the study was crucial for me, because I believe in being culturally responsive and sustaining to students as much as I believe in students thinking critically about themselves and the world around them. Luis Moll, et. Al (2005) add,

*There is tension inherent in this “practice” approach to culture. On the one hand, it makes us conscious not to make assumptions about anyone based on their ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and so forth. On the other hand, some commonalities will be shared within groups because of shared histories, and it is these commonalities that provide the richest themes for the classroom teacher. (p. 132)*

As I incorporated students’ funds of knowledge into the classroom setting, students were able to learn about each other and find similarities as well as difference. Having included the funds of knowledge of students provided a way to build classroom community. As a teacher, incorporating that into the classroom brought valuable teaching experiences where students’ experiences became assets to the literature discussions. This was a way in which funds of knowledge influenced not just my decision making as a teacher, but their decision making as students who together shaped learning and growth.

### **Conclusion**

The theoretical frames that were explored in this chapter played a big role in my approach to teaching and to conducting this research. The theories that I was immersed in provided me with the opportunity to reclaim my purpose for teaching, while also allowing me a fresh and new perspective as I took into account both my role as the educator and the role of students. Theories allowed me to question my role and think critically about how students perceive my role. Theories allowed me to recognize the responsibility I hold as an educator and how my role can impact students.

For me the theoretical frame allowed me to step back as students moved forward to create spaces that were meaningful to them. Their responses and reflections about who they were and the funds of knowledge they brought with them played a crucial role in my decision making and helped me shape this study to their needs as Latinx students.

As I went through the research with students, I wasn't solely collecting data, I was constructing and building lifelong relationship with students. I was learning from them as they were learning from me. My understandings were not imposed on students but used to be invited into conversations. We shared a space where our dialogue compelled us to think critically about the world, our identities, and our transformations as readers and human beings.

The constraints of being a teacher within a system encouraged me to push through and strive for students. It allowed me to compare what I was learning in theories to what was really happening in the classroom and to think back and reflect on the many challenges teacher researchers can face.

The challenges I faced as an educator through district mandates and school wide requirements informed my teaching, I was able to reflect on pedagogy and theories and what my values as an educator are in relation to how instruction is still being framed in schools. The challenges allowed me to question the educational system and the banking model put in place to reflect about what really matters in the classroom: students.

Pushing through had its rewards. Students felt valued and respected. When students stood up for themselves to question what they were reading, thinking about issues, such as immigration or family separation, to thinking about creating change in themselves that was a reward in itself. When students have spaces to communicate and teachers make the effort to keep their theories and practices alive, all is possible. For students, discussions like these served as reminders that who they are and what they bring into the classroom is a treasure not just to their peers and teacher, but to the world.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Implications

*“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot un-educate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.”-Cesar Chavez*

Within the walls of the classroom, Latinx students await opportunities to see themselves as valuable assets in education. Their voices are silenced as educators, textbooks, and the mandated curriculum overpower opportunities for students to share who they are. With that silence comes oppression and a repeated cycle of discrimination, in which Latinx and marginalized students in the U.S. fall into an abyss of invisibility.

It was imperative, therefore, to create a study in which as an educator and a researcher, the work conducted in the fourth and fifth grade classroom with Latinx students I could provide insight on the value of incorporating spaces that invite Latinx students to share their thoughts on matters that are both important and valuable to them. It is only when educators and researchers take the time to create spaces for Latinx students that they can learn from these students and the valuable experiences they bring to construct change and transformation in the classroom.

### Summary

This dissertation created spaces for Latinx students to engage in powerful literature discussions, where they engaged with culturally relevant literature that invited them to discuss and share their thoughts, voices, and stories. Within these conversations seven themes arose along with subthemes that reflected the issues raised by Latinx students. The themes came from the analysis of the data which consisted of sketch to stretch artifacts, transcripts of the literature discussions, student written responses, graffiti boards, teacher reflection journal notes, and



weekly teacher memos. In this analysis, the themes that arose are a reflection of the issues students felt compelled to talk about. These themes related to issues around *Family, Borders, Dreams and Hopes, Racism, Identity, Childism, and Fear*; These themes indicated what Latinx students in the fourth and fifth grade found valuable to share as the discussions not only represented their voices, thoughts, and stories, but also the events around them from news reports, social media posts, and current situations at home. In creating these spaces, I was able to reflect on the issues that Latinx students found valuable to discuss as one of my research questions sought to explore the social issues students discuss when engaging in literature discussions.

This dissertation also discussed the theories that were meaningful in my process as a teacher and a researcher. The theories explored important aspects that informed my teacher decision making from collecting the books to conducting the research throughout the course of the study and approaching the data analysis. It was imperative for me to share the theories that influenced my decision making as I explored my own pedagogical practices. It was important in that process to find my own teaching philosophy and my beliefs of education by exploring theories around funds of knowledge, transaction, culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy. The theories that were explored allowed me to critically reflect on the ways I was constructing a space for Latinx students to share their experiences.

Part of this work in this dissertation is my own reflection of my experiences as a teacher researcher and as a Latina as I reflected on my experience of being a student in the U.S. and the lack of opportunities to explore my own identity, culture, and language as a Latina. For me, reflecting on my experience allowed me to re-evaluate myself as an educator in the U.S. and how I would use my experience to create more effective and meaningful educational experiences for

Latinx students. My experience informed my purpose for this dissertation and my approach to teaching Latinx students to meet and acknowledge the voices students bring to the classroom setting.

In addition, this dissertation explored theories about and around education and literacy, as well as my own story and the stories of the students in presenting the seven themes that were most important for Latinx students in the fourth and fifth grade classroom. This dissertation is an addition to the research that others have done before me such as Angela Valenzuela, Julia López-Robertson and so many more around Latinx students and the discussions or stories they bring into the classroom. The literature review presented in this dissertation is just a part of a conversation that brings light to the value of incorporating culturally-based experiences for Latinx students.

My process and methodology for creating a timeline and collecting the books that are relevant to students in order to conduct the research and study as I sought to answer the following questions were also explored in this dissertation. The following questions were established during my process and purpose for conducting this work:

1. What social issues do students discuss in literature discussions?
2. How do literary response strategies influence student dialogue?
3. How does the theoretical frame influence my decision making as a teacher?

The research in the fourth and fifth grade classroom adds to the dialogue around the voices of Latinx students in classrooms today. My hope for this dissertation is that as teachers and researchers continue to value the Latinx community and that as we develop theories around education, there is a reminder to integrate Latinx students and their experiences and voices in the classroom. In addition, I hope that this dissertation is a reminder of the value for educators to reflect on their own positions and pedagogy in the educational setting in order to create

meaningful learning opportunities for all. Finally, I hope that this dissertation is a push to provide and conduct critical learning experiences for students that will allow them to find significance in their critical thinking, reflection, action, and transformation. This research encouraged the voices of Latinx students at Mariposa Elementary to flourish as a swarm of diverse butterflies reaching visibility and significance in education.

### **Purpose of Study**

In my approach to this dissertation, I found myself reflecting as a Latina and the occasions in school where I found my identity, culture, and language absent. Reflecting on those experiences and the situations I approached as I furthered my education allowed me to reevaluate the role education plays towards Latinx students. What changes will I make to support Latinx students and the experiences they bring to the classroom? Finding literature and having this awareness allowed to me to think deeply about how I could transform those experiences for Latinx students at the elementary level today.

I sought to create spaces and opportunities as both an educator and researcher to learn more about Latinx students at Las Mariposas Elementary and myself, thus coming up with the three research questions for this dissertation. In the first question, I sought to learn about Latinx students and what they found meaningful. In the second question, I wanted to find how literature strategies influenced student dialogue, while the last question speaks more to my purpose for teaching and how theories around education and literacy would inform my decision making as a teacher and researcher for this study and beyond.

Hence, my purpose for this study revolves around Latinx students and the voices they bring into the classroom setting through my own reflection of being a Latina student. I believe that education should not be about othering or silencing a group of people or individuals, instead

it should be a resistance to oppression. Education should be open to the voices and stories that everyone brings into the classroom setting with educators creating engaging and inviting opportunities for dialogue.

### **Theoretical Frame**

The theoretical frame for this research consisted of multiple theories and theorists who explored areas from culturally relevant pedagogy to literacy. The theories dialogued and intersected with each other in this dissertation to create a new frame for seeing the complexities and beauty of education.

Louise Rosenblatt (1965, 1978) theory on transaction became significant in this study. Her theories explores the roles of the reader and the text as they work together to create a transaction unique to the reader and the text (p. 1). Gordon Pradl (1996) adds to the conversation by stating that literature can become a tool for democracy in the classroom setting. He adds that literature can produce meaningful opportunities for questioning and thinking critically about the world. In addition, Pradl (1996) argues that democracy can only occur when teachers take the time to reevaluate their positions and roles in the classroom. Teachers must acknowledge that there are power structures in play in the classroom and use that knowledge to create spaces where students can partake in their learning and decision making. These theories were informative on the aspect of literacy and the role literature can play in the educational setting.

On the other hand, Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti (2005) explored the theory around funds of knowledge, stating that educators must create learning spaces for students to bring in what they already know into the classroom. In addition to funds of knowledge, bringing in a culturally relevant pedagogy is vital. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) argues that educators must acknowledge the differences children bring and create spaces to

accommodate their needs for authentic learning to occur. Geneva Gay (2018) argues that education must not just be relevant to students' lives and needs, but education should also be responsive to students. Gay (2018) adds that when teachers stray from standardized practices to produce a culturally responsive pedagogy, students gain a deeper significance for school and within themselves. Alim and Paris (2017) state that culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy can also be sustaining. They argue that culture is always shifting and that with that complexity, teachers must also be flexibility and consistent in sustaining learning to meet that constant shift and growth in students. These theories focused on the significance students bring when teachers build culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining places that invite students' funds of knowledge.

John Dewey (1938) explores the idea of experience in his work as he discusses the meaning behind the term and theory of experience. His theory is a reminder that experience has complexities and that with experiences comes interaction. His work focuses on sharing the roles educators must then play when acknowledging the role of experience. Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, takes a different turn reflecting on the roles of educators and students through the role of those oppressed and those that are oppressors. Freire (1970) argues that there are complexities within hegemony and power which can be evident in society and in the educational system. His work speaks to producing opportunities for educators to become problem-posers rather than "bankers" of knowledge. These theories speak to the role of educators and students to promote powerful learning spaces.

The theoretical frame in this dissertation brought in important aspects and pieces for the construction, process, and analysis of the work conducted with the fourth and fifth grade Latinx students in their literature discussions. This work is a reflection of putting theories into practice,

but also allowing practice to inform the theories in action. The theoretical frame incorporated in this work is a reminder of the important relationships between the educator, students, and texts in a classroom space. It is a reminder to create spaces that allow and invite theories to flourish and enhance learning for a Latinx community, as well as other communities, in order to produce meaningful learning opportunities for further work.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collected in this dissertation consisted of student sketch to stretch artifacts, graffiti boards, written responses, and audio recordings. In addition, teacher journal notes, and weekly reflection memos were also analyzed. The data was collected and analyzed four different times. The analysis was done using post it notes to categorize feelings, teacher interpretations of the data, themes or topics students discussed most, as well as the social issues that were constantly being discussed or referenced in the images, written responses, and dialogue. In every observation of the data, a specific word or issue resounded the most. This constant appearance in sketch to stretch artifacts, discussions, and written responses were recorded as significant and grouped into broad intertwining themes and related subthemes.

### **Revisiting Research Findings**

In this section, the three research questions are summarized as the questions and the findings are revisited briefly. Each question and its findings are discussed sharing the most interesting aspect of that research question and findings.

**What Social Issues do Students Discuss in Literature Groups?** The first research question explored in this study examined the social issues discussed by Latinx students. Seven intertwining themes were found that revolved around *Family, Borders, Dreams and Hopes*,

*Racism, Identity, Childism, and Fear*, with related subthemes. In each of these themes and subthemes students' voices were analyzed as they shared personal stories, thoughts, and feelings.

Students found themselves connecting to the literature as many felt empathy for the characters, while others understood the issue at a personal level having gone through a similar experience. Students heard similar conversations in the news, referencing current national immigration policy and the way immigration is addressed in the state of Arizona. Students shared powerful stories and references, news reports, family stories and experiences from their community or neighborhood.

Students connected to immigration as a form of racism. The images and conversations among students illustrated fear, anger, sadness, and confusion. Students addressed issues on the border and thought about the reasons people come from Mexico and other Latin countries into the U.S. They reflected on their own personal stories of immigration as some shared stories of family members crossing the border or having crossed the border themselves with their family. These stories and experiences enriched the reading and dialogue and added a personal level and a window into the Latinx community.

This first question on the social issues students discussed indicated that the discussions dealt with experiences close to students' lives and surroundings. Students were able to critically make connections, pose questions, and construct understandings that pushed them to think of possible solutions. It was interesting to find that the issues compelling to adults also provided significance for students. The students understood these stories critically and personally; they grasped the overall issues and critiqued them as they made connections to their lives.

The social issues that students discussed interestingly intertwined allowing students the to reflect on the relationships that these issues have to each other. The issues around borders and

family intertwined closely almost reflecting a cause and effect structure. They discussed issues that were meaningful to them, that they could connect to either personally or from a distance. The issues are relevant and current today for the Latinx communities who await opportunities in school to share their stories and voices.

**How Do Literary Response Strategies Influence Student Dialogue?** It was imperative to analyze the influence of response strategies on student dialogue as well as analyzing the social issues. For this question, the relationship of the strategies to the content and amount of student dialogue was analyzed in order to identify any patterns or relationships between the literature discussion strategies such as sketch to stretch, graffiti boards, and written responses in relation to the conversations of students.

No literature discussion strategy stood above another. Instead the strategies supported students' dialogue based on their needs. Students who found themselves more talkative found graffiti boards significant in their dialogue as it allowed students opportunities to share their ideas by referencing quick drawings and words jotted on the graffiti board. For students who talked more, graffiti boards allowed them to communicate more because of that dialogue aspect that the graffiti board supported.

Students who were shy to speak in front of their peers or who found themselves limited to share during the graffiti board discussions, because some students talked more than others, found sketch to stretch or written responses a better way to dialogue about their responses with their peers and teacher. For some students, writing served as a better method for sharing their thoughts and dialogues because writing allowed them to jot their initial thoughts down on paper and to write those ideas in more detail that would otherwise be shared in a conversation. Conversations may take different forms based on those involved. Students, for example, may talk too much, or



share ideas that may not relate to the initial idea, taking conversations elsewhere. Written responses served as a clear and concise strategy for students who prefer to think about issues thoroughly and then jot ideas down.

Sketch to stretch served a purpose for students who found writing to be extremely difficult. Some students jotting something down was difficult. Some students felt more comfortable speaking, where others felt comfortable sketching their reflections. Sketching allowed students who may have difficulty writing or in talking about ideas to draw a quick sketch. The image conveyed ideas or issues more powerfully than words for them. There is a significant difference between writing about guns pointed at immigrants versus seeing an image depicting angry faces pulling a gun on someone.

The most interesting aspect of this question is that literature discussion strategies did influence discussions based on the needs of students, not on how much one discussed in the dialogue versus another. For example, graffiti boards did not have more responses than written responses or sketch to stretch, instead literature discussion strategies supported students' needs to reflect as learners and participate in conversations within our classroom.

**How Does the Theoretical Frame Influence My Decision Making As A Teacher?** The theoretical frame became a vital component to my work as a teacher researcher in informing my role as an educator and researcher. Exploring how the theoretical frame influenced my decision making allowed me to reflect on my approach to the pedagogical practices I was constructing in the classroom. Therefore, it was significant to know how I was allowing culturally relevant pedagogy or transactional theory to inform my teaching decisions and practices to support and invite students' voices into the classroom.

This process allowed me to evaluate my approach as a teacher as I thought about how I would incorporate the theories into my decision-making process to create meaningful opportunities for Latinx students to engage in literature discussions. Observing this decision-making led me to see that culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies can inform my teaching as well as invite students' experiences and stories in the classroom. How would I move away from the traditional classroom and push against an oppressive educational setting to a more inviting space for Latinx students to dialogue? How would I use what I know to incorporate relevant books to Latinx students' lives? How would my decision making, and the theories help me to become a better educator for Latinx students?

At the same time, how would theories be challenged by my experiences of being a teacher in an educational system that pushes towards a data driven curriculum and standardized testing? How would I use the theories to push through the system and re-evaluate my position as a teacher in comparison to what the educational system is constructing education to be like today with an emphasis on data? The most interesting aspect in this analysis was seeing both aspects of the theories influencing my decision making. First, the theories influenced me in allowing me to create a valuable space for Latinx students to dialogue and build strong and meaningful learning experiences and relationships with their peers. Secondly, the theories influenced me in questioning the current educational system and the limitations that a data driven theoretical frame imposes on culturally relevant, sustaining, responsive pedagogy, transaction, and other theories. Taking a step back to examine the theories closely for how they supported me and how they were also challenged throughout the process allowed me to see a spectrum of complex systems that are encountered by Latinx and marginalized students.

Seeing the theories in my decision making and those being overpowered by a schoolwide approach to data driven instruction was the takeaway from this question because I was able to see my role as an educator and reflect on constructing valuable spaces for Latinx students and observing the systems that restrict these spaces. This question became an eye opener for building learning experiences that invite Latinx students to share who they are so they see the value they bring into the classroom and that what they bring can become a part of the curriculum.

### **Implications of this Research**

The work conducted for this dissertation is just a beginning as Latinx students await more opportunities to find their voices valued within education throughout the United States. The work conducted in the fourth and fifth grade classroom in Las Mariposas Elementary is only a fragment of what needs to be done in U.S. schools today.

Latinx students need spaces where they can bring their stories and experiences into the classroom and the educational field. The time for change is now. Latinx students, as do all students, need responsive school systems in place that respond to the power of diversity. Students need spaces where they are no longer invisible from the curriculum, instead becoming the center of the curriculum. Educators need to become advocates for *all* students and become aware of the great responsibility they hold as they mediate between theory and practice to construct powerful spaces for true and authentic learning to take place. It is only when educators take the time to reflect on their theories and philosophies that they can work towards an educational system that promotes success for everyone. In the following section, I propose implications about the power of literature as well as what I find absent in today's children's literature around Latinx experiences. In addition, I share four significant themes that I propose

for future work and implementation as a takeaway from this study through the lens of an educator. Lastly, I share implications for future research as a researcher.

### **The Power of Literature**

Through this study I learned that literature can be powerful for both students and educators. Literature can invite students and educators to find out more about the world and themselves. Books can invite students to share different perspectives with each other, empathize with characters who may or may not be like them, and transform their views of self and world.

As an educator, immersing myself with theory and learning about how literature can become a powerful means in the classroom allowed me to grow and embrace the stories students brought. I found myself transforming my view of literacy to go beyond an overemphasis on phonics and skills in reading instruction. Instead literature can become a pathway for students and educators to grow as they engage with the world, learn about the world, and learn with each other. For example, as the discussions got richer towards the end of March to May, students began questioning the educational system, the administration, and the curriculum itself. Latinx students became aware of power roles being played out in school and questioned them.

When students were given consequences for behaviors that they felt were not wrong, they again questioned why. Students shifted their dialogue and responses from accepting things to questioning how things should be. They began seeing that the curriculum lacked opportunities for them to learn or to see themselves represented. They started seeing the roles adults played, specifically the roles educators in the classroom played in relationship to students. They noticed that in other classrooms students were being silenced, where in our classroom, students were encouraged to speak up and question.

With that said, I would like to interview other educators and the reading specialist at Las Mariposas Elementary to understand their views of literacy. How could educators build from literature and become advocates and allies for their students rather than be bankers of knowledge? Are teachers, administrators, and reading specialists ready for this shift in literacy? If so, what kind of impact might this have for Latinx and *all* students?

Literature is a compelling doorway into viewing ourselves and others from new perspectives. It can move readers into reading for meaning, purpose, adventure, compassion, and change. For Latinx students, reading became a doorway into the self, such as Lili who came out because of the bravery she saw reflected in Naomi León, a character in *Becoming Naomi León*. The self is *becoming* through the reading, and so is transformative. The implications from this experience is that literacy is powerful in becoming who we are.

Consequently, literature should also stay in tune with the readers of today. Readers are diverse; therefore, books should be diverse too. Something that I noted in this study was the difficulty of finding literature about or around Latinx experiences. There were not a lot of books available. In addition, it was even more difficult to find books written by Latinx authors. I also noted that many of the books dealt with immigration and language issues. Many of the students in the classroom had been in the United States for two or more generations, hence they didn't have a personal experience of immigrating to the U.S. Instead those stories were their grandparents' stories. Of the books that I did find, many were published many years ago, dating back to the 90's. One recommendation thus is that publishers of children's literature make an effort to publish more relevant and current Latinx literature that can be reflective of the diversity of Latinx communities and peoples, both coming into the United States and those already living here. It is also our responsibility as educators to collect and gather books that reflect all students'

lives, perspectives, and stories as well as push for a curriculum that is relevant, responsive, and sustaining of students' cultural experiences.

### **Working for *la Raza***

Latinx students and their experiences, thoughts, stories, cultures, and identities are essential to the classroom setting. Thus, providing an educational curriculum that responds to Latinx students is a crucial component for the success of these students in U.S. schools. When Latinx students come into a classroom that lacks a responsive curriculum, students cannot feel valued and so remain uninterested in school. This can have negative results for students, as they find themselves disconnected from school and learning. In addition, this can result in Latinx students feeling invisible and unimportant and can affect the way they see schooling. As Paulo Freire (1970) states, “those oppressed by oppressors continue a cycle oppression unless the oppressed liberate themselves, then can both oppressors and those oppressed become restorers of humanity”(p.44).

Students need an educational curriculum that appreciates the people's/la raza's history, identity, beliefs, and culture. As educators and researchers, creating spaces that invite Latinx student is a responsibility. Educators and curriculum alike must work hand in hand for *la raza*. In this argument, educators must work for change so that Latinx students can be seen as assets to education, not a disadvantage. Latinx students, as seen in this study, bring in powerful reflections on important issues that are as relevant today as many years before. Latinx students struggle with a society that oppresses their community. Borders and walls are enforced physically as well as emotionally. Students find borders between Mexico and the U.S. as much as they find borders between schooling and their lives.

Conversations that are relevant and important to the Latinx community are often put in the back burner of education, although education promises equitable opportunities for all. As standardization becomes the overpowering framework for school and data driven discussions push for high test scores on high stake tests, students become immersed in a banking model that pushes aside identity in favor of test scores.

As educators the cry for a Latinx community to be invited into the classroom space is vital. Educators are responsible for this change as much as researchers who integrate and search for theories and philosophies for effective teaching practices. The people, *la raza*, must not be absent from this work. They should be central to all work conducted around education. People are essential in school as much as they are in life. Freire (1970) states, “the objective of any true revolution—requires that the people act, as well as reflect, upon the reality to be transformed” (p.130). Latinx students, along with all students, must become central within classroom settings in the U.S., where diversity is an informant as the classroom setting as an enriching space for all students to share with each other.

How can I work for *la raza*? This starts with informing oneself of the people. Who are they? What stories do they bring? Students are not just empty vessels but bring in knowledge and experiences vital to the learning community. Moll, et. al (2005) state, “The concept of *funds of knowledge*, which is at the heart of this book, is based on a simple premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (p. x). Educators who take the time to get to know Latinx students and their funds of knowledge create an education that is responsive to who they are.

Working for *la raza*, requires humility, empathy, love, and understanding. By no means does this signify that educators must become less than students, but that educators must strive for

all people in their classrooms. Educators must not underestimate or judge Latinx students, instead they must become informed of who Latinx students are as human beings. Educators must approach this with empathy, seeing their students' lives through a new lens, by aligning their hearts and teaching to students' needs. Educators must approach Latinx students with humility recognizing that students bring in knowledge. In addition, educators must approach Latinx and all students with love, as relationships are built between students and educators. Finally, understanding, is essential to becoming a responsive educator. One must understand the needs and experiences students bring into the classroom in order to build from those to produce enriching learning opportunities.

Working for *la raza* means bringing in resources, books, and histories that are relevant to students' lives. Students should see connections with who they are and what they know to what they are learning. It is vital in this process to bring in multiple resources and strategies. Students should have spaces that consist of dialogue and reflection in order to move towards a space of transformation to evaluate their positionalities and take steps towards action.

### **The Power of *Literatura en el Salón***

Literature is compelling. The stories students read, and share can be transformative in opening new life spaces. When literature is used in the classroom that can become relevant to students' life, students feel connected. That connection is important as stories and books can become pathways into learning more about the self and the complexities of the world. Literature becomes meaningful to the reader and the reader's life. Rosenblatt (1978) states that as both reader and text collaboratively speak to each other through the words on the page to produce a transaction that is true and genuine in changing both (p. 10). This transaction is unique to the



reader and the text and its results are powerful as the reader in the classroom feels valued and visible. Rosenblatt (1965) adds,

*The reading of a book, it is true, has sometimes changed a person's entire life. When that occurs, the book has undoubtedly come as a culminating experience that crystallizes a long, subconscious development. In such cases the book usually opens up a new view of life or a new sense of the potentialities of human nature and thus resolves some profound need or struggle (p.188).*

Culturally relevant literature is essential and meaningful as students feel representation and connection to the characters' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Students who read relevant literature to their lives feel like they can provide information and experiences to dig beyond the pages of the books. They become experts. When literature is irrelevant to students' lives, students in return can feel inefficient and disconnected to the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of characters. Although they can learn from other's experiences, it still is important to have literature present in the classroom that speaks to each student so students can see themselves represented. This isn't to say that only Latinx books should be in classrooms, but that they should not be absent. Diverse books should not be optional in classrooms, they should become a central aspect of the learning community. Building a diverse library in the classroom and incorporating diverse literature in the curriculum is valuable, as it can promote the beauty in diversity and build relationships among readers, moving beyond the borders of a single representation, to a more realistic exploration of the world.

Gordon Pradl (1996) discusses the importance of literature for democracy in the classroom setting. His work is a reminder of how literature can become gateways into deep and critical conversations. Literature can become a powerful opportunity for students to engage in deep conversations about issues that matter to them. For this dissertation, Latinx students found

the books around immigration, such as *Pancho Rabbit and The Coyote*, as meaningful introductions to deep conversations shared among students. Pradl (1996) adds,

*Sharing literary readings can inspire democratic satisfaction. In a democracy, literary response is not a search for final meaning. Rather, democracy promotes the collaborative mediation necessary for readers to share and evolve their interpretations. Each new poem—just as each new person—has the potential for speaking to our imagination and defining anew some understandings we have of the world. Thus, all imaginative literature can be seen as challenging or rearranging our preconceived notions. (p. 10)*

When re-evaluating how literacy is taught in the classroom, educators must keep in mind not just the content of the books or literature to be explored, but the conversations that will spark from those experiences. To construct powerful literacy practices in the classroom, educators must first strive for diverse books in the classroom and curriculum. Second, educators must recognize the beauty of transaction among reader and between the text. Finally, the literature incorporated in the classroom should not be used to limit meaning, instead literacy should inspire Latinx students to have in-depth and critical conversations that can lead to storytelling and appreciation of the knowledge that readers bring to the literary experience. An implication for educators is for teachers to construct powerful literacy spaces for Latinx and other marginalized students as they engage in a space of transformation of ideas, reflections, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. A book can change a child's life, books that are culturally relevant and diverse can do much more.

### **Working Con el Corazón**

In the center of education lies *el corazón*, the heart. Being a Latina myself, working at Las Mariposas Elementary with Latinx students has empowered me to continue to work with the heart, *el corazón*. Working *con el corazón* means to give it all. Educators today are overpowered with data-driven education practices which may sometimes lead educators to produce test scores

rather than work with the lives and stories that students bring into the classroom. Educators must strive to resist viewing students as incompetent or empty vessels to be filled and instead find their potential and bring that into the classroom space. Educators must build long lasting relationships and must go beyond the curriculum and into the hearts of its students.

Education is not merely a task, it is a calling. It is the most significant aspect of a students' life. Working with *el corazón* means to approach education with love and passion, knowing that a difference is being made. When educators approach students, students need to feel cared for. It is only through teaching with the heart, *el corazón*, that students feel loved, valued, and welcomed. As a result, when students feel recognized and cared for, they strive for success and develop their own empowerment.

Teaching with *el corazón* with Latinx students is a rewarding experience. Latinx students not only need to see themselves in their learning experiences or have spaces to share their stories, but they need a caring and responsive educator who teaches with the heart. Latinx students need educators who strive to build relationships with Latinx students. When educators teach from the heart the dreams of all students in a classroom become the dreams of the educator. When an educator teaches with *el corazón*, the success of students becomes the priority. In order to teach with *el corazón*, the educator must first and foremost have a passion for teaching and learning. In addition, the educator must go beyond the classroom to students' lives and relationships, which requires risk taking and advocacy for students as an ally. In return, when teaching from the heart, students in return, will give their *corazón* to their work and growth.

### **Planting *Semillitas***

Educators plant *semillitas*, seeds, in the lives of students. These seeds, when cared for, thrive and become fruitful. For Latinx students, educators must remember that a caring and

responsive environment become the soil and the nourishment for students' growth. As advocates and allies to students' lives, educators must work towards creating a space that enriches these lives.

When Latinx students have educators, who act as gardeners planting and reaping a good harvest, students will also partake in their own growth. The tiniest seed or *semillita*, will bear the greatest fruit and educators must remember that the growth won't be direct or immediate, but that, with time, it will flourish into something beautiful. Latinx students await opportunities for educators to take the time to support them and meet them where they are at. They thrive for an educational space that invites them into meaningful learning conversations and await spaces that will guide them into finding their own transformations and growth.

It can be easy to fall into a routine of test-driven instruction and hard to move against that mandate. Yet, sometimes, the hardest things can become the greater opportunities. Latinx children have voices and they deserve to be heard. They deserve to have educators who help bring light into who they are as people and as assets into education and society. Educators must take risks to plant *semillitas*. No matter how small, the seed, when planted right, will continue to grow and students will make sure it will grow. This dissertation is a reminder that this work is crucial and that Latinx students deserve recognition in U.S. classrooms. This dissertation is a reminder that when given opportunities, Latinx students discuss issues that matter and are relevant to their lives, and that teachers can implement theories to produce a fruitful environment that meets the knowledge, interests, and needs of students. In return, the tiniest *semillitas* grow and students take that with them for the rest of their lives. So, educators, must plant those seeds just right, because Latinx students can make a difference and no one can take what has been planted away.

So, what can educators do to create effective spaces of learning? First is building relationships with students. Educators need to take the time to know the students in the classroom and the values and experiences that they bring. Second, educators must strive to embrace an authentic curriculum that is relevant to students' lives. If the mandated curriculum doesn't include their lives, educators can find resources that will. Teachers also need to be aware of diversity and share diverse experiences with students. Educators can map out the learning that both the educator and students want to engage with, like I did (see Appendix A). Next, I suggest educators collect materials and resources that speak to the learning students want to engage with. This includes finding multiple pieces of literature, bringing in the community, taking the time to have interviews with students and family, and integrating these understandings into the standards and expectations of the mandated curriculum. Finally, educators should provide opportunities for students to conduct their own research and questioning of topics or subject issues that students raise in literature discussions.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Students hold powerful and unique perspectives about the world. In future research, I want to involve children in the analysis of the data to get their perspectives and interpretations about their work. Engaging children in data analysis would provide a more genuine interpretation of children's thinking and responses to the issues and topics discussed within their groups, graffiti boards, written responses, and sketch to stretch activities. Would Latinx students have pointed out different or similar themes from my interpretations? Why would they determine certain themes above others? How would this analysis impact the way in which children learn and reflect about their own understandings?

In addition to having students analyze the data with me, I would propose conducting quick informal interviews with students throughout the study. What are Latinx students thinking as they make comments, write a reflection or draw a specific image? I would have liked to have conducted multiple interviews to ask students individually why they wrote, drew, shared, or reflected in a certain way. I would have liked to have students share their reasons for determining how they were responding to the books and to their peers.

The audio recording was a limitation in the study as the recorder had to be passed around as students talked so the device could record their responses. In the future I would also have liked to have invested in a better recorder system that wouldn't require the audio to be passed around, but instead be placed in the center of the group with a better mic to pick up students' discussion. That way the students' talk could be more natural and allow the flexibility to communicate easily without having to pause to pass around the audio recorder. With a voice recorder and mic at the center of the table, more students would have space to share their voices and build off of each other's responses, rather than pausing all the time to pass around a recorder.

### Conclusion

"Why are you here?" my Spanish professor asked. His soul penetrating into mine. Deep inside, there were people who helped me along the way, my teachers, professors, parents, and loved ones near to my heart. They planted *semillitas* in me and gave their whole *corazón* to my growth. Even the absence of my identity in some way took me to where I am today. It allowed me to reflect and grow as a human being when I became more and more aware of who I was. I may not know how I got to where I am today as a Latina woman striving in her own educational journey, but I know that I have a purpose for why I am where I am. I am a teacher and a

researcher and a Latina, and who I am requires that I use what I know to support and accommodate students' needs. I know that being a part of my barrio and teaching in our neighborhood school has a meaning and a purpose, as I too have become a gardener, an advocate, and ally to Latinx students, as well as others who have been marginalized, just as those around me gave their whole heart and planted seeds in me, I too seek to do the same for all students.

Las Mariposas Elementary's name also has a purpose in this work, as *mariposas* refers to butterflies. Butterflies go through metamorphosis and education also goes through a similar transformation as educators, researchers, students, and the curriculum shift throughout time. Once transformation occurs there is no going back, only forward. Since the dissertation, I have worked with new students at Las Mariposas Elementary, who also seek a space for growth and as I work with this new class, those who have left never truly leave.

It wasn't even the second day of school, when Romero came back. Romero had been othered by previous teachers and educators at Las Mariposas Elementary had given up on him. Teachers spoke negatively about Romero and most assured me that no matter what I would do, "I'd never reach him." I was advised to send him to the office when he would give me trouble. Romero and I pushed against all odds and built a strong relationship that I will never forget.

"Ms. Serrano do you think I will make it one day?" he asked. "Of course Romero, of course you will! And I will be right there with you!" I said on our way to the Cooper Center for a field trip. He'd come back that first day of school, two months after this experience to knock on our classroom door. I was placing papers away when I heard a "knock, knock" at the door. "Had I really heard something?" I asked myself. The knock grew louder and I opened the door to find Romero standing there smiling at me. "He never smiles at anyone," a previous teacher had told

me. “Romero!” I cried bursting into tears. “I am so happy to see you! I am so, so happy!” He was too as we walked into our classroom together and spoke for two hours about his summer and where he was going to school. The last thing he told me was, “Miss, thank you, thank you for everything you did for us.” He paused and added, “Thank you for taking the time to teach us powerful things and for caring about us. You made me feel like I was good enough and I will never forget that.” I smiled and said: “No, thank you Romero, I love you so much with all of my heart and know that everything I do, I do for you.” We said we’d catch each other later and I know that this was the start to something beautiful in Romero’s life.

Days later, more and more students whom I had worked with for this dissertation came back to visit. They’d all say the same thing and we’d talk for a couple hours catching up as if we’d never really been apart. Then without expecting, Lili, who had gone through so much with me throughout the course of this dissertation and who had come out in the process, came to say thank you and hello. We jumped as we hugged and shared tears of joy. “Thank you for helping me find myself,” she said. “No, thank you!” I said. “Thank you, Lili, for showing me bravery and courage and for being the best educator I can be. You helped me grow as a teacher and person and I will never forget that.”

Everyone in each of our classroom matters. Everyone. Everyone has a voice, a story, a purpose and it is our responsibility to help guide students to find their purpose and value. For Latinx students it is imperative that schools move away from othering and silencing to a classroom that promotes recognition and growth. Their dreams matter and it is only when educators take the time to construct significant teaching experiences that students construct meaningful purposes to take into the rest of their lives. The most valuable aspect for this dissertation is the relationships that were created to remind educators that teaching is much more



than instruction. Teaching goes beyond the classroom and into the hearts of students and teachers as a space for learning, growth, and transformation.

In this dissertation, Latinx literature and the conversations of students were explored, along with the theoretical work that influenced my decision making. In addition, the literature discussion strategies and their relationship to students' dialogue were also discussed along with the social issues that students found compelling. In that analysis, the findings, show that Latinx students can have deep and critical discussions about issues that matter to them, because they find those to be relevant and correspond to their lives. This dissertation is a reminder that classrooms that meet Latinx students where they are can prove fruitful results and that the relationships built throughout the process last a lifetime. Latinx students deserve justice in the classroom and they deserve culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies that bring in funds of knowledge, push against oppression, move toward action and transformation, in a democratic classroom and appreciate the transactions of readers. These classrooms create a space where students like Romero and Lili, can thrive, and education as a whole can become *mariposas*.

## APPENDIX A

### The Original Curriculum Timeline Proposal

#### 5 Week Cycle: Weeks 1-5 Theme: Journey

- **Week 1: January 7-11, 2019**
  - **Novel:** *Becoming Naomi León* by Pam Muñoz Ryan
  - **Group 1 Books:** *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales, *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna, *Migrant* by Maxine Trottier
  - **Group 2 Books:** *Mamá The Alien* by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and *Dear Primo* by Duncan Tonatiuh
  - **Group 3 Books:** *Two White Rabbits* by Jairo Buitrago and *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh
  - **Group 4 Books:** *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown and *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Drawn Together* by Minh Lé and *I Love Saturdays y Domingos* by Alma Flor Ada, and *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi
- **Week 2: January 14-18, 2019**
  - **Novel:** *Becoming Naomi León* by Pam Muñoz Ryan
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales, *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna, *Migrant* by Maxine Trottier
  - **Group 1 Books:** *Mamá The Alien* by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and *Dear Primo* by Duncan Tonatiuh
  - **Group 2 Books:** *Two White Rabbits* by Jairo Buitrago and *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh
  - **Group 3 Books:** *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown and *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal
  - **Group 4 Books:** *Drawn Together* by Minh Lé and *I Love Saturdays y Domingos* by Alma Flor Ada, and *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi
- **Week 3: January 21-25, 2019**
  - **Novel:** *Becoming Naomi León* by Pam Muñoz Ryan
  - **Group 4 Books:** *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales, *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna, *Migrant* by Maxine Trottier
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Mamá The Alien* by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and *Dear Primo* by Duncan Tonatiuh

- **Group 1 Books:** *Two White Rabbits* by Jairo Buitrago and *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- **Group 2 Books:** *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown and *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal
- **Group 3 Books:** *Drawn Together* by Minh Lé and *I Love Saturdays y Domingos* by Alma Flor Ada, and *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi
- **Week 4: January 28-February 1, 2019**
  - **Novel in Verse:** *The Wild Book* by Margarita Engle
  - **Group 3 Books:** *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales, *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna, *Migrant* by Maxine Trottier
  - **Group 4 Books:** *Mamá The Alien* by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and *Dear Primo* by Duncan Tonatiuh
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Two White Rabbits* by Jairo Buitrago and *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh
  - **Group 1 Books:** *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown and *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal
  - **Group 2 Books:** *Drawn Together* by Minh Lé and *I Love Saturdays y Domingos* by Alma Flor Ada, and *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi
- **Week 5: February 4-8, 2019**
  - **Novel in Verse:** *The Wild Book* by Margarita Engle
  - **Group 1 Books:** *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales, *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna, *Migrant* by Maxine Trottier
  - **Group 2 Books:** *Mamá The Alien* by René Laínez and Laura Lacámara, and *Dear Primo* by Duncan Tonatiuh
  - **Group 3 Books:** *Two White Rabbits* by Jairo Buitrago and *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh
  - **Group 4 Books:** *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown and *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Drawn Together* by Minh Lé and *I Love Saturdays y Domingos* by Alma Flor Ada, and *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi

**5 Week Cycle: Weeks 5-10 Theme: The Journey of Overcoming**

- **Week 6: February 11-15**
  - **Novel:** *How Tía Lola Came To Visit* by Julia Alvarez
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Pepita Talks Twice* by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and *The Upside Down Boy* by Juan Felipe Herrera

- **Group 1 Books:** *Calling The Doves* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *My Diary From Here to There* by Amada Irma Perez
- **Group 2 Books:** *Me and My Fear* by Francesca Sanna and *The Day War Came* by Nicola Davies
- **Group 3 Books:** *Somos Como Las Nubes* by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and *I'm New Here* by Anne Sibley O'Brien
- **Group 4 Books:** *I Pledge Allegiance* by Pat Mora and *Carmela Full of Wishes* by Matt de La Peña
  
- **Week 7: February 18-22, 2019**
  - **Novel:** *How Tía Lola Came To Visit* by Julia Alvarez
  
  - **Group 4 Books:** *Pepita Talks Twice* by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and *The Upside Down Boy* by Juan Felipe Herrera
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Calling The Doves* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *My Diary From Here to There* by Amada Irma Perez
  - **Group 1 Books:** *Me and My Fear* by Francesca Sanna and *The Day War Came* by Nicola Davies
  - **Group 2 Books:** *Somos Como Las Nubes* by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and *I'm New Here* by Anne Sibley O'Brien
  - **Group 3 Books:** *I Pledge Allegiance* by Pat Mora and *Carmela Full of Wishes* by Matt de La Peña
  
- **Week 8: February 25- March 1, 2019**
  - **Novel:** *How Tía Lola Came To Visit* by Julia Alvarez
  
  - **Group 3 Books:** *Pepita Talks Twice* by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and *The Upside Down Boy* by Juan Felipe Herrera
  - **Group 4 Books:** *Calling The Doves* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *My Diary From Here to There* by Amada Irma Perez
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Me and My Fear* by Francesca Sanna and *The Day War Came* by Nicola Davies
  - **Group 1 Books:** *Somos Como Las Nubes* by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and *I'm New Here* by Anne Sibley O'Brien
  - **Group 2 Books:** *I Pledge Allegiance* by Pat Mora and *Carmela Full of Wishes* by Matt de La Peña
  
- **Week 9: March 4-8, 2019**
  - **Novel in Verse:** *Under the Mesquite* by Guadalupe Garcia McCall
  
  - **Group 2 Books:** *Pepita Talks Twice* by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and *The Upside Down Boy* by Juan Felipe Herrera

- **Group 3 Books:** *Calling The Doves* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *My Diary From Here to There* by Amada Irma Perez
  - **Group 4 Books:** *Me and My Fear* by Francesca Sanna and *The Day War Came* by Nicola Davies
  - **Group 5 Books:** *Somos Como Las Nubes* by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and *I'm New Here* by Anne Sibley O'Brien
  - **Group 1 Books:** *I Pledge Allegiance* by Pat Mora and *Carmela Full of Wishes* by Matt de La Peña
- **Week 10: March 11-15, 2019**
    - **Novel in Verse:** *Under the Mesquite* by Guadalupe Garcia McCall
    - **Group 1 Books:** *Pepita Talks Twice* by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman and *The Upside Down Boy* by Juan Felipe Herrera
    - **Group 2 Books:** *Calling The Doves* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *My Diary From Here to There* by Amada Irma Perez
    - **Group 3 Books:** *Me and My Fear* by Francesca Sanna and *The Day War Came* by Nicola Davies
    - **Group 4 Books:** *Somos Como Las Nubes* by Jorge Argueta and Alfonso Ruano, and *I'm New Here* by Anne Sibley O'Brien
    - **Group 5 Books:** *I Pledge Allegiance* by Pat Mora and *Carmela Full of Wishes* by Matt de La Peña

### 5 Week Cycle: Weeks 10-15 Theme: The Journey of Change

- **Week 11: March 25-29, 2019**
  - **Novel:** *Merci Suarez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina
  - **Group 1:** *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales
  - **Group 2:** *Listening with My Heart* by Gabi Garcia and *Thank You Omu* by Oge Mora
  - **Group 3:** *Imagine* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *The Streets are Free* by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert
  - **Group 4:** *Drum Dream Girl* by Margarita Engle and *Emmanuel's Dream* by Laurie Ann Thompson
  - **Group 5:** *Islandborn* by Junot Diaz and *Going Home* by Eve Bunting

- **Week 12: April 1-5, 2019**

- **Novel:** *Merci Suarez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina
- **Group 5:** *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales
- **Group 1:** *Listening with My Heart* by Gabi Garcia and *Thank You Omu* by Oge Mora
- **Group 2:** *Imagine* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *The Streets are Free* by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert
- **Group 3:** *Drum Dream Girl* by Margarita Engle and *Emmanuel's Dream* by Laurie Ann Thompson
- **Group 4:** *Islandborn* by Junot Diaz and *Going Home* by Eve Bunting

- **Week 13: April 8-12, 2019**

- **Novel:** *Merci Suarez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina
- **Group 4:** *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales
- **Group 5:** *Listening with My Heart* by Gabi Garcia and *Thank You Omu* by Oge Mora
- **Group 1:** *Imagine* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *The Streets are Free* by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert
- **Group 2:** *Drum Dream Girl* by Margarita Engle and *Emmanuel's Dream* by Laurie Ann Thompson
- **Group 3:** *Islandborn* by Junot Diaz and *Going Home* by Eve Bunting

- **Week 14: April 15-19, 2019**

- **Novel in Verse:** *Unbound* by Ann E. Burg
- **Group 3:** *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales
- **Group 4:** *Listening with My Heart* by Gabi Garcia and *Thank You Omu* by Oge Mora
- **Group 5:** *Imagine* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *The Streets are Free* by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert
- **Group 1:** *Drum Dream Girl* by Margarita Engle and *Emmanuel's Dream* by Laurie Ann Thompson
- **Group 2:** *Islandborn* by Junot Diaz and *Going Home* by Eve Bunting

- **Week 15: April 22-26, 2019**

- Novel in Verse: *Unbound* by Ann E. Burg
- **Group 2:** *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales
- **Group 3:** *Listening with My Heart* by Gabi Garcia and *Thank You Omu* by Oge Mora
- **Group 4:** *Imagine* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *The Streets are Free* by Kurusa and illustrated by Monika Doppert
- **Group 5:** *Drum Dream Girl* by Margarita Engle and *Emmanuel's Dream* by Laurie Ann Thompson
- **Group 1:** *Islandborn* by Junot Diaz and *Going Home* by Eve Bunting

### 5 Week Cycle: Weeks 16-19 Theme: Journeys Never End

- **Week 16: April 29-May 3, 2019 Socio-Economic Status Identity**

- Novel: *La Linea* by Ann Jaramillo
- **Picture books:** *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de La Peña and *A Gift from Abuela* by Cecilia Ruiz
- **Group 1:** *Waiting for Papá* by René Colato Laínez and *Friends from the Other Side* by Gloria Anzaldúa
- **Group 2:** *Super Cilantro Girl* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *America is Her Name* by Luis J. Rodriguez
- **Group 3:** *Undocumented: A Worker's Fight* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *From North to South* by René Laínez
- **Group 4:** *La Frontera* by Deborah Mills and *Marwan's Journey* by Patricia de Arias
- **Group 5:** *The Dress and the Girl* by Camille Andros and *Amelia's Road* by Linda Jacobs Altman and *First Day in Grapes* by L King Perez
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- **Week 17: May 6-10, 2019 Where do our identities fit in our world?**

- Novel: *La Linea* by Ann Jaramillo
- **Picture books:** *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de La Peña and *A Gift from Abuela* by Cecilia Ruiz
- **Group 5:** *Waiting for Papá* by René Colato Laínez and *Friends from the Other Side* by Gloria Anzaldúa
- **Group 1:** *Super Cilantro Girl* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *America is Her Name* by Luis J. Rodriguez

- **Group 2:** *Undocumented: A Worker's Fight* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *From North to South* by René Laínez
- **Group 3:** *La Frontera* by Deborah Mills and *Marwan's Journey* by Patricia de Arias
- **Group 4:** *The Dress and the Girl* by Camille Andros and *Amelia's Road* by Linda Jacobs Altman and *First Day in Grapes* by L King Perez
- **Week 18: May 13-17, 2019 Appreciating Each Other's Identities**
  - **Novel:** *La Linea* by Ann Jaramillo
  - **Picture books:** *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de La Peña and *A Gift from Abuela* by Cecilia Ruiz
  - **Group 4:** *Waiting for Papá* by René Colato Laínez and *Friends from the Other Side* by Gloria Anzaldua
  - **Group 5:** *Super Cilantro Girl* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *America is Her Name* by Luis J. Rodriguez
  - **Group 1:** *Undocumented: A Worker's Fight* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *From North to South* by René Laínez
  - **Group 2:** *La Frontera* by Deborah Mills and *Marwan's Journey* by Patricia de Arias
  - **Group 3:** *The Dress and the Girl* by Camille Andros and *Amelia's Road* by Linda Jacobs Altman and *First Day in Grapes* by L King Perez
- **Week 19: May 20-24, 2019 Valuing my Identity**
  - **Novel in Verse:** *They Call Me Guero* by David Bowles
  - **Picture books:** *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de La Peña and *A Gift from Abuela* by Cecilia Ruiz
  - **Group 3:** *Waiting for Papá* by René Colato Laínez and *Friends from the Other Side* by Gloria Anzaldua
  - **Group 4:** *Super Cilantro Girl* by Juan Felipe Herrera and *America is Her Name* by Luis J. Rodriguez
  - **Group 5:** *Undocumented: A Worker's Fight* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *From North to South* by René Laínez
  - **Group 1:** *La Frontera* by Deborah Mills and *Marwan's Journey* by Patricia de Arias
  - **Group 2:** *The Dress and the Girl* by Camille Andros and *Amelia's Road* by Linda Jacobs Altman and *First Day in Grapes* by L King Perez



## APPENDIX B

### Original Template to Guide This Study

Questions	Primary Data	Secondary Data	Analysis
What social issues do students raise during literature discussion circles around Latinx literature experiences?	Transcripts of student dialogue in literature discussions.	Collecting student artifacts created as part of the literature discussion	Sorting and categorizing the social issues students raise to create categories of the types of issues.
How do different response strategies such as reflection journals, sketch to stretch, and graffiti boards influence student dialogue?	Transcripts of literature discussions and artifacts created by students in these groups. Includes strategies such as sketch to stretch response and graffiti boards.	Conferences with students one on one and small group discussion-video and audio recording	Sorting out themes that students discuss when using a particular response strategy (activities used to invite students to dialogue) to look for patterns within and across strategies in the types of dialogue and interactions.
How does my theoretical frame impact my process of decision making as a teacher throughout the work that I do in the classroom related to literacy and literature?	Teacher Reflection Journal	Going back to the theoretical frame by re-reading Rosenblatt (1965), Freire (1970), Ladson-Billings (2009), etc.	<p>Looking at my own teaching and reflecting on factors that have influenced pedagogical decisions I make.</p> <p>Examine the data to develop a process to show the ways in which I do/do not use theory in making decisions.</p> <p>Examining my teaching decisions within the theoretical frames of this study and reflecting on my approach to facilitating literature discussion circles.</p>

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